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# **New Media, Masculinity and *Mujra* Dance in Pakistan**

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD in January

2015

Centre of Media and Film Studies

SOAS, University of London

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## **Abstract**

This research examines the notion of masculinity and how it is constructed and practiced through production, distribution, and consumption of soft porn mujra dance videos, and its discursive practices in Pakistan. The tradition of mujra dances as live performances became an integral part of Punjabi films that transformed through live stage shows to video format and new media technology, including YouTube. Reaching a wider audience through video CDs, cable TV, Internet and YouTube, it effectively replaced older forms of sexual practices and consumption.

I argue that in mujra dances videos, the narratives of sexual desire were primarily written, produced, and consumed by men that fantasize sexually empowered public women who mock and ridicule male sexuality. I maintain that these fantasies emerged during the religious Islamic orthodox rule of Zia-ul-Haq (1979-88) that coercively controlled sexuality discourses in Pakistan. It resulted in evolving different methods of expressing male sexual desires. The producers, distributors, and consumers of mujra dance videos successfully use their agency to negotiate with the notion of piety and religion whilst entertaining their sexual desires.

My research in the city of Lahore, Mall Road, and its adjacent road, Hall Road, reveals dichotomous practices, and an ambiguous relationship between the state and its people. Government institutions are located in close proximity to Hall Road, an electronic market with its piracy networks that deals in mujra videos and pornography. In the end, I connect the urban geography of Lahore with search paths and video postings on YouTube, where complex male sexual desires express similar dichotomous practices in virtual space. This research gathered data through interviews, content analysis of mujra videos' songs and dance, and mujra video posts on YouTube. I believe that this research examines the existing discourse on male sexuality, and adds to the existing scholarship that focuses only on the notion of piety, new media, and the public sphere in the Muslim world.

## Prologue

In 2006 I made a video, titled, *Mardangi Tere Kai Roop*<sup>1</sup> for BBC Urdu Online, which focused on the complexities of male desire by raising issues around male viewing of semi porn *mujra* video CDs available in Lahore's markets, stage shows and net cafes. I was pregnant, at the time of researching for the video, a fact that made it much easier for me to approach men for interviews around stage shows and net cafes. I even visited a producer at his home. Whenever I initiated a dialogue, I felt more like a person instead of an object of their gaze. As I experienced throughout my course of fieldwork and making of the film, motherhood is regarded with lot of respect. While shooting a dance sequence from the backside of the stage through a window opening, the organizers of the shows regularly offered me refreshments. The five-minute video started with women dancers on stage while men applauded and captured the dance on their mobile phones. It was followed by frames that showed men busy surfing semi porn videos in an Internet café of a low-income area. The café, located in Shadbagh, a low-income residential and commercial area, was referred to me by my male students, who also accompanied me to it, where we conducted the discussion while I filmed. Driving with four male assistants/students in the late evenings, I covered many areas of Lahore looking for appropriate places to include in the film. Brief impressions of a male performer on a stage dance theatre, an Internet café owner and two men who were primarily responsible for the making of a very popular dance series in digital VCD format, were inserted to develop the narrative of the video. I realized for the first time how much the male performer suffered in his stage performances when I interviewed Rambo, a famous Punjabi film actor/dancer. While sitting in the small make-up room backstage, he criticized the producers who gave more importance to female dancers and reduced him only to the scenes that portrayed jokes with sexual connotations. The moment I finished recording the interview with Rambo,

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<sup>1</sup>Meaning, many facets of masculinity.

“BBC UrduOnline”. BBC.co.uk. 2006.

”[http://www.bbc.co.uk/urdu/interactivity/blog/story/2006/10/061026\\_ss\\_mardangi\\_farida\\_ms.shtm](http://www.bbc.co.uk/urdu/interactivity/blog/story/2006/10/061026_ss_mardangi_farida_ms.shtm).

Deedar, a female dancer, waved at me to share her opinion. Ready for her dance performance on stage, she confidently articulated energetically about her skilled dances and how much of an object of rivalry she was among other dancers, due to her growing popularity. Backstage, I felt like a person with a camera recording whatever the performers wished to express. The video's narrative portrayed the popularity of these dance videos, the constant rise in their demand and the social structures that encouraged male viewing as conceived by the interviewees in the video. The excitement with which the audience came out of the stage show with gleaming men stating their joy in the car park was captured as my team hurriedly ran from one group to the other. These responses were juxtaposed with the comments of the producer of mujra videos to highlight the dichotomy in society that placed much emphasis on the celebration of male desire but condemned female viewership of these videos. At the end of the video, one of the makers of these semi porn VCDs acknowledged the presence of silence and awkwardness around the notion of male sexuality.

The BBC page offered viewers the chance to comment on the video, which was part of a series addressing the larger issues of sexuality. The responses that were recorded on the website (an example of some of which is given below as Figure no. A), indicated the commentators' peculiar way of dealing with issues comprising any 'taboo' content. Initially the producer of the series, Musadaq Sanwal, hesitated to share the comments due to their abusive nature, but he emailed them to me eventually. After much reflection over the contents, which came with details like their location and contact numbers, I realized that the material merited an in-depth analytical study. I developed some of the issues raised in the film as a formal research proposal that finally resulted in a PhD thesis. A large number of the responses, which I grouped together, pointed myself and the BBC in 'constructing' something that was 'un-Islamic' with an intention to defame Pakistan. They failed to criticize what the video portrayed in their reactions, rather, they opted to use Islamic discourse as a point of reference in their critique. Their main objection i.e. that there was no Islamic content in this video came as a

surprise, because, neither I, nor the BBC had ever claimed to present this video from an Islamic perspective. The accusations highlighted a certain mindset that prevailed in the popular discourse of contemporary Pakistani society and required a deeper understanding. The comments failed to engage in a debate that revolved around cultural constructions, social structures, sexuality, and/or masculinity. Instead, Islamic discourse was used as a platform for discussion highlighting issues that will be discussed later in the following chapters. Other responses targeted me as a female director whose own sexuality needed to be addressed rather than the content of the film. The use of language was abusive and I was attacked as a female for broaching the subject, which was deemed not suitable for a Muslim woman. The responses further implicated myself and the BBC and myself for humiliating and attempting to destroy the cultural norms of Pakistani society.

-----Original Message-----

From: [Raheel@www54.thdo.bbc.co.uk](mailto:Raheel@www54.thdo.bbc.co.uk) [mailto:[Raheel@www54.thdo.bbc.co.uk](mailto:Raheel@www54.thdo.bbc.co.uk)]

Sent: 05 دسمبر, 2006 7:03 PM

To: Urdu

Subject: 061026\_ss\_mardangi\_farida\_ms.shtml -

Name: Raheel

Surname: Ejaz

Town:

Country:

Email: [pakistan2k@gmail.com](mailto:pakistan2k@gmail.com)

Telephone: 798445

Message: bbc HAVE no aim but to promote the wrong issue,they want the Pakistan to look like Europe where is no objection what you do when you do, can any one from BBC tell me whats there aim of producing these type of thing but just to let sexual ill person to enjoy the animals stories this is because the BBC Loves this Culture and want to promote it in Pakistan, now the New ORdinance is I sure the first step in this revolution May Allah Crush there aims Ameen

-----Original Message-----

From: [rashid@www5.thdo.bbc.co.uk](mailto:rashid@www5.thdo.bbc.co.uk) [mailto:[rashid@www5.thdo.bbc.co.uk](mailto:rashid@www5.thdo.bbc.co.uk)]

Sent: 03 نومبر, 2006 3:09 PM

To: Urdu  
Subject: 061026\_ss\_mardangi\_farida\_ms.shtml -  
Name: rashid  
Surname: dar  
Town: rawalpindi  
Country: Pakistan  
Email: [rmd\\_pk@hotmail.com](mailto:rmd_pk@hotmail.com)  
Telephone: +923215178651

Message: In my opinion it is better to avoid the sex abitions for a muslim woman, because a muslim woman is may be a mother of a Wali, and She have to produce the muslims and if she has modesty or shyness it will transfer in her children and they will be the greeatmuslim and Allah may bless them, She will pray for her children and her parents and her husband.

-----Original Message-----

From: [abdullah@www4.thny.bbc.co.uk](mailto:abdullah@www4.thny.bbc.co.uk) [mailto:[abdullah@www4.thny.bbc.co.uk](mailto:abdullah@www4.thny.bbc.co.uk)]  
Sent: 18 نومبر, 2006 8:13 AM

To: Urdu  
Subject: 061026\_ss\_mardangi\_farida\_ms.shtml -  
Name: abdullah  
Surname:  
Town:  
Country: pakistan  
Email: [farooq\\_275@yahoo.com](mailto:farooq_275@yahoo.com)  
Telephone: 0302-7594059

Message: it is not good film and thereis no islamic concept in the film

Fig. A: Selected comments on BBC Film

It is worth speculating why the comments used religious and specifically Islamic discourse for an immediate response, when the film itself did not maintain religion. Is this way of addressing such issues a result of a long history of dictatorship and state's impositions of Islamic injunctions? Is religion being used as a shield to hide away the real emotions and concerns raised by the video? The fact that they were more interested in reprimanding me (specifically by stressing my gender), rather than discussing the issues of male desire and sexuality discussed in the video is itself a sign of complexities surrounding this issue, if not globally, then specifically within Pakistan's social and cultural milieu. The website provided along with the



link of the video an image and brief details of the filmmaker that positioned the filmmaker into a complex relationship with the issues, if not the video. This positioning might also have triggered the emotions of the viewers who felt awkward listening to a discussion about desire and sexuality with showcased an obvious comfort level of the interviewees facing the camera and thus saying it out loud to the female filmmaker. These emotions could be further heightened when the discussion was raising complex issues of sexuality rather than being limited to boasting male sexual desire or 'unlimited' sexual appetite. It is interesting to note that any debate or dialogue around problems and complexities of masculinity are followed by either a silence or a dismissal of such debate. It is this realm of discomfort and awkwardness that I wanted to explore further.

## Introduction

This dissertation seeks to investigate the rise of homemade semi-professional videos of *Mujra*, a popular genre of erotic female dancing in Pakistan. I establish, through extensive fieldwork and content analysis of mujra videos that, in an overtly religious and ideological society like Pakistan, people productively design their agency to fulfill illicit sexual desires. Their agency is partly successful due to the abundant presence of new media technologies, and productive because it has significantly contributed in transforming mujra dance practice. This historical dance form, mujra, has rapidly developed and evolved over the last three decades and now comprises of several sub-genres, which cater to the demands of the consumers and meet ever increasing technological and digital demands in the entertainment world. I situate the emergence and transformation of this genre within the larger scholarly framework of South Asian Media Studies by tracing the aesthetics of Pakistani film Industry, particularly the Punjabi song and dance and their lyrics, and the development of characterization of hero and heroine in the Pakistani Cinema.

For a comparative analysis in which I examine the discursive practices and cultural formations of digital culture, it was of paramount value to also locate the discursive practices of mujra dance videos in the virtual realm of YouTube and Internet, along with the field research in the city of Lahore. Therefore, the Mujra dance videos' circuit on Hall Road, a famous electronic market of Lahore, and YouTube, a new interactive discursive virtual space for people to consume, share, and comment on the mujra videos, position parallel research fields in this dissertation. This methodology propels research inquiries for a comprehensive understanding of the scope of new media and digital technologies. Additionally, the discourse developed around mujra videos' presence on YouTube highlights significant facets of Pakistani male sexuality. The findings of the research demonstrate complex power relationships between male sexuality and female sexuality, primarily manifested through the boasting of male desire and its constructed

perceptions. The sexuality discourse becomes further complicated with the infusion of religious and political comments posted on *mujra* videos on YouTube, also similar to people's practices I encountered in my research in Lahore. Contrary to the content exhibited in the videos, these religious and political comments do not demonstrate any direct connection. Nonetheless, their analysis exposes the complexity of male desire and many layers of sexuality practiced in Islamic Republic of Pakistan. By analyzing the *mujra* dance practice within its complex cultural formations and spaces of both geographical landscape of Lahore and the virtual space of YouTube, this dissertation purposes to bring forward the politics of desire, its subversive nature and peculiar strategies employed by the agents of desire in an overtly religious state. These cultural formations are a power play between the state and citizen, religious ideology and sexual desire, which uses productive manipulative means to assert their agency<sup>2</sup> by direct or indirect mechanisms.

On several levels, the consumption of *mujra* videos is a complex phenomenon. The cultural formations of *mujra* dance consumption comprises of private viewing of *mujra* CDs, public shows in theater and weddings, and mushrooming net cafés. In order to facilitate the regular flow of consumption, manipulative means are devised to deal with regulating authorities. All these cultural formations and dealings become very complicated as they reveal the fluidity present in the authoritarian structure of the society as imposed through decades of religious indoctrination. The informants including shopkeepers and distributors blatantly expressed the level of comfort that was achieved with the regulatory authorities, primarily due to the latter's personal indulgence in these *mujra* dance videos. The mechanics of police-raids to control and appease the media upon reporting of these 'illegal' and 'vulgar' materials; burning of illicit CDs in public; and banning of *mujra* dancers and singers for a short period by the Lahore High

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<sup>2</sup> Agency of the consumers and makers/producers of the *mujra* videos becomes obvious when people accept the rules knowingly and the ideological stance of the society regarding Islamic values. They continue to perform to attain their sexual desires, in which they are not necessarily defying the rules, but are 'exercising' their agency by catering to their desires, to act of their own free outside of the social structures and governing rules. See for more: James Wong, P2, <http://www.cpsa-acsp.ca/papers-2008/wong.pdf>, and History of Sexuality vol.1, method chapter 92-102

Court all signals ambivalence of the state which is constantly negotiating with official ideological narrative and consumption of sexual desire. I also examine the power relations between ruling authorities and the shopkeepers, and the shopkeepers/producers and the dancers of the mujra videos. It is revealed that the power play of the producers and distributors with female dancers and female consumers is both exploitative and lascivious with consensual sexual relationships. Through analyzing various patterns of production and consumption of people belonging to different socio-economic backgrounds and age groups, I further investigate the differences and similarities in the perception of masculinity and sexuality. It is contended that even male form a fantasized perception of sexuality of other males belonging to the different socio-economic class. It is this very ambiguous, yet, forceful agency of people, performed at several levels, which make this dissertation (appropriately) also an enquiry of the role of power in the production, consumption and discourse of sexual desire in Pakistan.

### ***The Research Problem***

This research is primarily focused on how the notion of masculinity is constructed through the production and use of soft porn mujra dance videos, and its discursive practices in Pakistan. It further explores the transformative aspect of new media including the Internet, video CDs and YouTube as an alternative to the old tradition of mujra dances, whereby virtual space and Internet cafés are the new sites of sexual practice and consumption. In order to approach the main question, I am posing several small but related questions in each chapter that consequently inform the focus of the study. Taken together, these questions lead one to the larger question regarding the notion of masculinity, the ambivalent power relations of the present day Pakistani society and the state, and how it is practiced and understood through discursive practices. This dissertation draws heavily from the theoretical frameworks of Ravi Sundaram, Lisa Wadeen, Brian Larkin, and Charles Hirshkind. In a perceptive analysis, Sundaram suggests that informal piracy of the electronic and digital spaces marks the power of these networks to subvert the grand design of Nehru's ideology of progressive India.

Sundaram's insightful study helps in understanding the parallel networks of piracy in Pakistan, within which the production of mujra dance videos is formulated. I draw heavily on his insight to argue that the discursive formations of mujra dance practices reveal sexual desire as a powerful force that enables people to assert their agencies and subvert the dominant religious state ideology.

The global piracy network of CDs is needed to be examined in order to understand the circuits of production, distribution, circulation, which consequently helps in transforming digital technologies in another genre indigenous to the local cultural context. The notable study of these circuits, especially in Nigeria by Brian Larkin, also reveals its roots within the piracy networks of India and Pakistan. Drawing from his analysis, I argue that piracy network was productive in initiating a new form of CD drama -- a new tradition in Nigeria, allowing shopkeepers and distributors to become producers of these video dramas. Similarly, in Pakistan, the piracy CD network and its distribution circuits have helped distributors and shopkeepers to experiment with digital technologies and become producers of the mujra dance videos, along with forming a circuit to fulfill their sexual desires through the creation of exploitative relationships with the dancers of mujra videos.

Lisa Wadeen's analysis focuses on the politics of Syria, reading portraits of authority as hero worship of dictator Hafiz-al-Assad. She examines how these portraits of authorities are used by the shopkeepers to avoid unnecessary police raids on their illegal businesses. Nonetheless, her study offers a parallel to this research when I investigate the presence of religious symbols, Quranic verses, and images of Mecca and Prophet's tomb, adorning the walls of the pornographic shops, as clever maneuvering techniques to ward off authoritarian and public rage. I argue that in repressed societies like Syria and Pakistan, people have employed creative means to maneuver their way around the oppressive tools of the state.

New media and digital technologies in the Muslim world have been the focus of many to analyze how the notion of piety and religious identity is established through listening to popular audiocassette sermons of religious text that connects the listener through auditory waves with his larger sense of piety. The most seminal study by Charles Hirshkind examines ways in which these cassette sermons have penetrated the public sphere in the form of a constant sound which emanates from everywhere - one even listens to these sermons while travelling in a taxi. Hirshkind's arguments of public sphere and the notion of piety significantly inform my theoretical framework that I have developed to understand how new media technologies are being used in Pakistan. I contend with the argument that new media and digital technologies are enabling Muslims to express illicit sexual desires. This is especially in the case of Pakistani mujra dance consumers, who use digital technologies to make their own productions, and create a discourse on YouTube, which is religious and political but emanates sexual fantasies and desires. The study of these discourses on sexuality helps us understand much more comprehensively, the scope with which new media technologies are helping people to assert their agency. This aspect is very important in my study, which contrasts with many previous studies where Muslim cultures are examined as dominantly overwhelmed with the notion of piety while I argue for new media as a tool of subversion that helps accelerate the profane desire. These multiple key theoretical frameworks help inform my research by closely analyzing each position of power, whether inert or manipulative, agency with a will or consciousness, subversion of the state or religion, and dichotomies revealed in sexuality discourse against the background of Michele Foucault's notions of power and sexuality.

The introduction is divided into three major sections. In the first section, I explore the historical background of mujra dance practices leading up to contemporary times in order to form a background for my inquiry. I structure this research within the wider scholarship on sexuality, pornography, and masculinity and place it within the framework of the more contextual literature on South Asian media studies. The second section

articulates and clarifies my use and understanding of specific terms and their definitions, which informs reading this research in a particular way. Their elucidation further explains the context within which I position my arguments in the subsequent chapters, like the notion of vulgarity in the Pakistani context is different from what is widely understood in international scholarly literature on vulgarity and pornography. Finally, the third section describes the methodological approach, code of ethics, and the structure of the thesis to follow.

## ***Section 1***

### ***Mujra Dance – the past***

It is important to briefly historicize the term *mujra* before I embark on exploring the socio-political sexuality discourse forming out of *mujra* dance practices in contemporary Pakistani society. The word *Mujra*, according to the Combined Practical Dictionary, has its root in the word *Ajra*, and *Jari hona* meaning continuation. It had several usages, including to deduct and to pay respect to someone in a poetic expression encompassing dance. The common and popular understanding of this word in Urdu is that of a woman dancing in front of a male audience seated in a circular formation. *Mujra* is derived from *kathak* dance, which uses a formal aspect of translating the romantic poetry of famous Urdu poets. Primarily a court dance, *mujra* was originally meant to lure the elites and the rulers of the Indian sub-continent. It evolved during the three hundred year Mughal rule in North India (Dewey, 2008, 147; Massey, 1999; Brown 2005). It was in Akbar's time when *kathak* dance became truly secularized in its content and form while the dancers further modified the dress during the Jahangir's period. The dancers wore *chust pyjamas* and 'high-necked diaphanous' dress called *angarkha* with many folds. The transparency of the dress showed the perfect lines of the posture when static and the flowing layers of *angarkha* accentuated the dance movement. During the Mughal era, the dancers used to concentrate on the rhythm, by 'tantalizing pauses and lightening pirouettes' (Massey, 22). The courtesans who used to perform were called *tawaif*. They used to hold a prominent position among the elites, as they were known to be the keepers

of culture. Therefore, people used to send their sons to their *kothas*<sup>3</sup> for learning etiquettes and matters of culture (Saeed, 2002; Naville, 2009, 2004; Brown, 2005).

Well versed in poetry, *tawaif* were the only women group which had access to education and public life and could freely intermingle with menfolk of high positions. Their inevitable role in politics was a result of their relationships with people of power, and hence became a reason for the British to control their movement during the Mutiny of 1857 (Naville, 2004). The control and confiscation of their properties and wealth by the British made this dance form difficult to thrive in its original manner. Thus, *tawaifs* were reduced to the role of singing, dancing and selling their body. The dance form itself tried to retain the grace of kathak, but increasingly degenerated into lascivious and sensual styles. This made the word *tawaif* synonymous with whore and prostitute, which many European adventurers called ‘nautch’ girls, a corruption of the word ‘*naach*’ meaning dance (Massey, 23). The end of Mughal Empire, thus, is also the end of this profession. Some *tawaif* were able to survive by entering into theater and cinema and from this point also began the recruitment of female performers from the Red Light area. (Saeed, 2011; Meyer, 1989)

### **Mujra dance – the present**

Whether pornography has shaped mujra dance videos or mujra dance forms has led pornography in contemporary Pakistani culture is a complicated question. The following brief introduction about the use of technology in representing mujra dance foregrounds the complex relationship between these two distinct genres. Mujra dance as a video form has gone through significant evolutionary stages in Pakistan. The oldest moving images of nudity, dating back to the 1960s and 1970s, comprised of the snap shots of women from Red Light district, typically prostitutes that displayed partial and sometimes full nudity along with sexual content. These were usually made by amateur photographers for private collections, but were soon circulated in close circles. After the inception of Pakistan, there

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<sup>3</sup> Literary means the roof terrace.



were a number of films in Urdu mainstream Cinema, like *Umrao Jan Ada* and others, which showed the life of a courtesan and thus highlighted this dance form. During the 1970's, when Punjabi cinema flourished so also evolved the dance form which was later termed as *mujra* dance because of successive use of these songs and dance movements at private parties and weddings by the public and dancing girls (Khan and Ahmed, 2010).

During the 1980's, which is regarded as VHS boom period (Page & Crawley, 2001), some of the scandal videos of female university students reached the public domain due to print media's coverage of such 'ills' of society.<sup>4</sup> Though severely criticized in the media and not openly available in the video shops, people still regarded these few videos as fresh, innovative and sensational.<sup>5</sup> Previously, the only nude videos that were circulating were of women from the film industry and red light area, whereas these sex scandal videos included 'modern' female university students. The genre of sex scandals has its roots, ironically, in the period of the religiously extremist military rule of the dictator General Zia-ul-Haq, when severe Islamic injunctions were imposed over matters related to illegal sex, alcohol consumption, and blasphemy. The dichotomy that prevailed at the time will be discussed in a later section of this chapter when the notion of religious ideology will be analyzed in relation to explicit sexual practices. During the 80s, a time of booming video culture and globalized commodity flow in South Asia as elsewhere (Page and Crawley, 2001), the technological flow bypassed the orthodox regime and its severe control over modes and agencies of cultural production. This happened specifically when the military rule of General Zia-ul-Haq imposed the heaviest censorship on the media in the history of Pakistan.

The 90's in Pakistan saw the widespread use of hands-on and user-friendly digital technology, which helped evolve the *mujra* dance genre into a

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<sup>4</sup> In a discussion with Sohaib Marghoob, media reporter as well as in-charge of reference section of the biggest news paper of Pakistan, Daily Jang.

<sup>5</sup> Few consumers referred to these videos as fresh and sensational during the research.

low-cost and speedy informal industry<sup>6</sup>. Using simple camcorders, the recording of *mujra* videos on Punjabi or (sometimes) on Bollywood songs situated the dancer in a public garden or a plush drawing room of a rented home. Additionally, the 'money-shot', to use Linda William's term, got reinforced through editing techniques revealing her breasts, bare legs and underwear while holding the gaze of the viewer and dance in abandon. The *mujra* dance experiments did not end here. Another significant modification transformed the production of these dance videos, in which a male performer entered the camera frame looking at the woman dancing as if he would conquer the world. But he himself does not attempt to dance and instead resorts to silent bodily gestures while simply viewing the woman dance, thus replicating the log like stiff body actions of famous Punjabi film heroes.



Figure. B Several shots showing the awkwardness of male performer by the covering of face; fully clothed in front of the camera while the act requires body exposure; and the man

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<sup>6</sup> S. Richard. About those Mujras. Retrieved on 03.06.12, 3:00 pm, <http://roughinhere.wordpress.com/2007/10/15/about-those-mujras/>, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mujra>, retrieved on 03.06.12, 2:55 pm

sitting on the sofa rigidly holding the body of the female and smiling while she dances sitting on his lap.

Another interesting twist entered the realm of porn subcultures of Lahore when the video makers started compensating for the absence of Pakistani males by juxtaposing the images of white heterosexual porn stars, acquired from the net or VCD's in the market, with exposed Pakistani women dancers. During the early 1990s<sup>7</sup>, the mushrooming growth of Internet cafes resulted in high rates of Internet use dominated by adult sites visits, and the viewing of scandal videos at the cafes, raising concern in the media.<sup>8</sup> The visuality of the porn images tends to be a surreal experience of mingling nationalities and races, as white bodies without faces shown in the act of sex, through a close shot of sexual organs, are clipped next to a dance of a Pakistani woman along with an anxious Pakistani man's face. The videos that attempted to bring Pakistani male performers in these collaged *mujra* dances instead gave an impression of male's lack of comfort in disclosing his identity in front of the gaze of the camera, while still feeling the desire to perform. For instance, some videos have men with masked faces showing either a long beard or a handkerchief, or with faces away from a woman who is dancing naked in front of them, juxtaposed with a full view of 'beautiful' modeled bodies of western male and female porn stars. In some of these videos one encounters a very stiff male body, which is definitely not used to performing in front of the camera and therefore is conscious of the gaze that is constructed. The experience of watching oneself perform in the camera frame further makes the desiring male an object in the imagined gaze of the camera next to side of his subject of desire. (Fig. B)

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<sup>7</sup> Internet Service Providers Association. Accessed: 10.07.12, 2:20 pm  
[http://www.ispak.pk/Internet\\_pakistan.php](http://www.ispak.pk/Internet_pakistan.php),

<sup>8</sup> Abbas, Salman. *Authorities fail to implement ban on cubicles in Internet cafes*. October 1, 2011. Accessed: 10.07.12, 2:00 pm  
<http://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2011/10/01/city/islamabad/authorities-fail-to-implement-ban-on-cubicles-in-Internet-cafes/>,

In present times, the mujra dance videos circulating in the market vary in their content and form. These videos, categorized under several genres, are examined in detail in the Second Chapter while a brief description of the categories follows to indicate the variety and usage. These videos range from professional stage dancers performing *mujra* on stage; low cost videos of hired female dancers from *Heera Mandi* performing with and without male viewers in low-priced motel rooms or private homes; video clips captured on mobile phone without the knowledge of the female participant (presumably girlfriend<sup>9</sup> of the mobile phone carrier); webcam shots without the knowledge and consent of couples sitting in Internet café's booth; sophisticated modern dance videos mimicking Bollywood and MTV dance videos featuring beautiful, slim western clothed females and well built handsome male dancers in a staged party around a swimming pool; and lastly, a 'mixed-plate' in which clips from western pornographic films are inserted in between the mujra dance sequences. These 'mixed-plate' videos primarily cater to the 'sophisticated' aesthetics of men belonging to the middle and upper classes, and the Pakistani community living in the UK, USA, UAE and Canada.

### **What makes mujra dance so appealing**

After carefully laying out the historic and contemporary transformative practices of mujra, from being a sensual dance for the nobility performed by the courtesans to pornographic rendering of desire, it is pertinent to study the elements present in the video that transform this traditional dance form to contemporary pornographic dance form. As mentioned above, one of the popular mujra dance videos genre, known as 'mixed-plate', relies heavily on the 'collaged' scenes edited from western hard-core porn film and inserted in between and sometimes after each dance sequence in the mujra dance CD. These collaged scenes serve the same 'cut-pieces' experience on the small TV or computer screen which Lotte Hoek points out in her ethnographic study of Bangladesh's B-grade obscene celluloid films (2013). Whereas in Hoeks study, the cut-pieces refer to a

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<sup>9</sup> There is a fixed price of five thousand rupees (approximately 45 GBP) I was told by one of my research assistant that many male students use this medium to earn some extra money.

'practice of cutting scene or images out of a film' (2013, 2), in the mujra dance videos, on the other hand, the obscene images cut/edited from other foreign videos circulating the piracy market, are 'inserted' in the video to form a collage. In other mujra dance video genres, the normal practice is to select the 'highlight' of the dance move, which consists of exposed or semi-exposed breasts revealed by dancers' lifting their shirt, their forward bending gesture to show breasts while shaking their body vigorously; and close up shot of opening/lifting of legs. These shots are then selected to form a collage in different shapes, appearing on the screen simultaneously along with a dancing figure. These collages form a heart, star and other shapes filling the screen in a sparkling, morphing and flipping technique to signal the eye sift through a full dancing female body and close up shots of body parts.

Looking at these inserted collages, it is important to place it within 'aesthetic formations' present in South Asia's media and film studies scholarship which deals, though marginally, with the issues of obscenity, pornography and vulgarity, along with its specific context of Pakistani society, and its moral and normative codes. It is relevant to enquire in what way this dance is seen as pornographic when it is transferred on DVD format? How is the context similar and different from other forms present in the region, ranging from dances on Bollywood to B-grade films in Bangladesh's obscenity sensibility and how does it contribute in furthering the existing study on vulgarity, obscenity and pornography in media and film studies of South Asia. Most importantly, my concern is to determine the context in which certain moves, actions and gestures becomes 'money shots' (Williams, 1999) despite them being only remotely similar to classic understanding of hardcore pornographic money shots of international porn videos.

The principals of hard-core, to put it in Linda Williams words, i.e. 'to privilege close-ups of body parts over other shots; to over light easily obscured genitals; to select sexual positions that show the most of bodies and organs.... or the externally ejaculating penises' (1999, 49), seems to serve its purpose through the insertion of collages and close-shots of dancers body parts alongside a full dancing figure. Similarly, the insertion of western hard-

core porn clips into the *desi* (local, Pakistani/Indian) dances quintessentially elevates these dance videos from 'sexually illicit' content to the 'hard-core' category. It is important for my research to take into account Jeffery Week's argument where he describes the term pornography as an 'exceptionally ambiguous yet emotive term, which takes on different meanings in different discourses' (1995, 232), as shown in the insertion of the close-up shots and western hard core porn images within mujra dances. Given that mujra encompasses sexually explicit dances, clips of hard-core western porn, and the collages of close-up shots of female bodies, the term mujra's contemporary usage in the local context suggests porn. Therefore, I categorize mujra as a continuation of circuit of 'illicit pornography in unpredictable directions' (Hoek, 2013, 5) in the context of South Asian study of pornography.

### **All that is Porn in Pakistan**

The term pornography, according to the Cambridge Dictionary Online means "books, magazines, films, etc. with no artistic value which describe or show sexual acts or naked people in a way that is intended to be sexually exciting but would be considered unpleasant or offensive by many people". Hardcore porn means "books, magazines, and films etc. showing sexual acts in a very detailed way" and soft-core means "books and films showing sexual activity which are less extreme and less offensive than other material of the same type."<sup>10</sup> What was considered hard-core before the 1960's is now part of every day representation in mainstream music videos. For my analysis here, I will use the term soft porn and pornography to discuss Pakistani/Punjabi dance videos not according to Western pornographic sensibilities but in terms of their usage in Pakistani cultural practices.

The other popular terms referring to obscenity, pornography or nudity in Punjabi and Urdu are *Nangi* (naked) and *Gandi tasweerain* (dirty pictures). *Mujra* is another word which has been used historically to describe dance by a courtesan. It is worth noting how Wikipedia reports on this dance

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<sup>10</sup> Cambridge Online Dictionary.  
<http://dictionary.cambridge.org>

form by stating at the end that 'It has taken a new form in Pakistan by becoming less artistic and more seductive, especially in Punjabi stage dramas.'<sup>11</sup> It is only through these tags and descriptions that the videos get a push up in the search path of the viewer, and not because of its popularity or user help in virtual archive (Gehl, 2009). This explains the wide use of the terms 'porn', 'hot' and 'sexy' with *mujras* of Pakistan online. In tracing pornography and its history, it is evident that definitions of pornography are notoriously ephemeral and are used primarily when marking the boundaries of 'high' and 'low', acceptable and obscene, normal and 'commercial' sex (Paasonen, 1). Porn is a dirty word in comparison to erotica, and the popular literature present in the history of South Asia which floats across these boundaries is regarded mostly as erotica and not porn. In Pakistani popular understanding, as reflected through various interviews, porn is considered a western phenomenon, whereas, the presence of local pornographic materials in everyday cultural practices is not recognized. A virtual space like YouTube provides a certain freedom, where discussants indulge in the viewing of these pornographic images and openly acknowledge their preferences. One video posted on the blog Greenhill Company<sup>12</sup>, titled *wild scenes* is about porn industry in Pakistan. One of the directors who is speaking for the '*Nangi*'<sup>13</sup> Pashtun films and its vulgar contents replied in question to peoples' objection to these films from Khyber Pukhtoonkhwa province, as 'women don't go to these cinemas, they are not allowed. Only men watch these films. So if women do not go to these cinemas then what is the point of objection?'<sup>14</sup>. This comment very clearly sets the context in which these films are seen. Being fully aware of the power of pornographic content released on cinema screen, it is the presence of women in the theater, women they know who

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<sup>11</sup> Wikipedia.org. Mujra.  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mujra>

<sup>12</sup> blog.  
<http://greenhillcompany.blogspot.com/2007/12/pakistan-porn.html>

<sup>13</sup>literally means naked, is commonly used to ascribe to images containing sex, pornographic elements, flesh etc. Sometimes even those images which are not explicitly revealing flesh are termed as Nangi due to certain female postures expressing seduction etc.

<sup>14</sup> blog.  
<http://greenhillcompany.blogspot.com/2007/12/pakistan-porn.html>

comes from families like their own, that makes the practice of watching pornography vulgar and therefore not suitable for the sensibilities of audience.



Figure D: Cover of a CD of *Mujra* Dance





Figure E: Two screen shots of YouTube and Google to demonstrate the results of the terms ‘porn’ ‘mujra’ and ‘vulgar’ etc.

With the juxtaposition of mujra dance with western images, the pleasure is attained by identifying with the 'powerful'. It is a result of male fear to counter the 'potential power of women' (Weeks, 233) by employing the most powerful image of white male body, most probably a continuation of colonialist psyche. An anecdote about cable TV and its penetration in the small towns was narrated to me by a colleague and an artist from rural Sindh. He said that all men loved watching these women dance on MTV. When he asked one of them what he saw there, the answer was, 'I am seeing that we will get these white women in *janat* (paradise) after we die'. He further asked 'what about your own women from this land?' To this, the man's response was, 'because males in the West are cruel to the world, they will be punished by getting our dark and ugly women, while we will get these white women'. These collaged videos echo this dichotomist approach where western influence on media as well as among the public is condemned, but remains the desire to go there and 'experience' the free life with white females. The issue of race and a colonial mindset, however, does not constitute a major part of my analysis except when I examine genres, which include western clips. The identification with the white penis parallels Williams' analysis of Marx and Freud's notion of the fetish; 'for both, fetishization involves the construction of a substitute object to evade the complex realities of social or psychic relations' (1999, 105). Williams asserts that fetishes are 'short-term, shortsighted solutions to more fundamental problems of power and pleasure in social relations'. The everyday tensions and struggles at work or home, as mentioned by some of the consumers in the interviews, are forgotten by seeing these images of ultimate desire.

This argument can be further elaborated by looking at the popular literary discourse of Pakistani moralists about the abundance of sexual freedom. For them, it was the sexual revolution of the west, which had degenerating effects on the moral values of the familial relationships in South Asia. Similar ideas also formed the central theme of many Hindi films like *Hare Krishna Hare Rama*, and the demonization of sexual freedom in Pakistani films such as *Society Girl* (Gazdar, 1997). Charu Gupta mentions

colonial advertisements and how a reform movement in order to sanitize society claimed that the abundance of such freedom was resulting in the downfall of morality and value system (Gupta, 31). These accounts simultaneously resent and condemn the west while recognizing the power of the master to enjoy plenitudes in terms of economic booties and an unlimited sex life. I argue that this fetish is created as a result of a long period of colonial rule, which continues in the present times through the consumption and usage of sophisticated technology. In the making of western hardcore pornographic films, the shots of genital organs are shown in a bright light with a 'perpetually' hard penis hardened with unlimited fluid reservoir which shines on the face of the female performers (Williams 1999). It is this inability to make high quality porn films<sup>15</sup> that leads to a reliance on using western clips to try and reproduce the fantasy of external production, while simultaneously catering to the desire of plenitude<sup>16</sup>.

The manner in which these collages from western porn films are inserted in *mujra* dance videos is also reflective of the complex issues of race and gender that are at 'the very center of the porn genre, as does the manner in which porn represents its historical moment' (Lehman, 2006, 1). The above-mentioned analysis based on the psychoanalysis and economical reading of the fetish in understanding and reading pornography poses a limitation, and thus, I refrain from using it in reading the material in the dissertation. Yet, at the same time, it also offers a way to understand the complexities present in the expressions and practices of desire.

Although these confessions (Williams, 229) of sex are written, produced, performed and distributed by men, and target only men as their audience in Pakistan,<sup>17</sup> the obvious unease<sup>18</sup> of male performers in engaging

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<sup>15</sup> As was confessed by two producers of the *mujra* dance videos Khalid Jutt and Kashif in an interview in 2010

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Although there are occasions when women also visit such theatres with *mujra* dances along with their male partners. Women have been reported (by shop keepers) to increasingly rent pornographic videos, but it is still too early at this stage of research to conclude if any consideration is given to prospective female audience while making these videos.

themselves in sexual acts with women, reflects on the complexity of pornography as a phenomenon essentially for the fulfillment of male sexual appetite. Is this 'transgression', located in a traditional society reflective of men desiring women desiring themselves (Standish, 2007), a male fantasy of enjoyment with their female counterparts or simply an experiment made possible owing to the amateur quality of these footage? Linda Williams, on the other hand describes successful erotic transgression as one 'that maintains the emotional force of prohibition' (2008, 15). Thus, this rise of sexual explicitness in a 'repressed' society, in the Foucauldian sense might not be an indicator of transgression, but on the contrary, an explosion of larger 'perverse' sexualities.

The notion of giving and receiving pleasure by an increased number of female consumers of western porn videos, as stated by Williams, has brought an understanding in the larger narrative of porn genre such that women are no longer only a subject of male desire, but are now participants in sexual performance for their own pleasure. However, Pakistani mujra dance videos are a fantasy show based on the performance of a female dancer on songs sung by female singers, but produced and financed by males, in which position the female performer is in a sexually charged and powerful situation, who needs to be satiated, and desires a male for her eternal satisfaction.

### **Understanding Sexuality and Desire**

Sexuality discourse and desire is a complex and misconstrued notion in Pakistani context. It is dichotomous, which encourages a silence on sex on one level, but allows for an explosion of sex in different cultural formations. It is diversified due to major debates of representation, body, and identity in the last two centuries in performance, literature, art and material culture, which I investigate deeply in the following text. Jeffrey Weeks explains that '(sexuality) is something which society produces in complex ways. It is a result of diverse social practices that give meaning to human activities, of

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<sup>18</sup> The feeling of awkwardness was discussed with the producer of some of the mujra dance videos which will be discussed in the later part of the chapter.

social definitions and self-definitions, of struggles between those who have power to define and regulate, and those who resist' (1997, 25). This argument provides the framework within which I position discursive practices, like religious ideology of the practitioners of *mujra* dance videos in Pakistan, their negotiations with the police, media and the High Court, and a constantly shifting power dynamic and relationship with female desire and sexuality. The theoretical framework developed in this research examines complex structural orders by closely following seminal works of Foucault on sexuality. For him, 'sexuality is not a given; it is a product of negotiation, struggle and human agency' (1997, 25). He further argues in his introduction of *History of Sexuality* that sexual discourse in the last two centuries was not silenced, as is wider perception, but it exploded in myriad discourses. In his term, 'repressive hypothesis' i.e. the notion of sex and exerting sexual discourse is an indication of power and control and this notion is equally valid in locating the agencies of power in Pakistani discursive practices. One cannot ignore the relationship of power and sex, as sex is not limited to pleasure alone. Through the use of law, religious indoctrination, social order, and morality, mankind has been able to control this 'wild' beast (1990, 5). The transgressed and subversive practices of this industry, the ambivalent role of the state, protests and threats by religious extremist groups and the responses of general public on the Internet, as I explicate further on in this thesis, are struggles of controlling the other, of defining one's sexual freedom and identity and of asserting power to regulate social order. We find in the practice of obscene cut-pieces in Bangladesh film industries a 'disintegration of Bangladesh's polity', which simultaneously produce fantasies of erotic desires compounded with violence (Hoek 2013, 4), whereas the *mujra* dance videos collages stimulate desire which is in constant negotiation with the social order, but devoid of images of sexual violence.

Sexuality and male desire has been prescribed by both religious order and popular literature in the history of Muslim world, in which literature explicitly discusses the rituals around expression of desire, and designate an important role to male sexuality in every aspect of daily social life. The past

two centuries has seen a systematic erasure of sexual discourses, in which the famous erotic literature disappeared from the libraries in the lands that were formerly under the Ottoman Empire (Ze'evi, 170) due to printing presses, colonization, and travels between the West and the Middle East.<sup>19</sup>

The scholarly works on sexuality within the Muslim world, which include Kecia Ali (2006) and Abdelwahab Bouhdiba (1985), discuss how men fear female charms, her body and her sexuality, declaring her a *Fitna*<sup>20</sup>. Thus both in terms of seduction and sedition, her charm or revolt is considered a Satan's trap (1985, 118). Maghen explores with the help of graphic illustration used in both the Hadith and *Fiqah* sources, how the two realms of flesh and spirit were smoothly traveled by practitioners and were only possible because of the rituals around *tawhara*<sup>21</sup>. This work further illustrates the sexuality of both the male and female in the time of the Prophet as part of the public discourse, where every act was uninhibitedly explained with explicit details, though, only in order to achieve the purity code (2005). All these accounts are important in signaling the trends one continues to find in contemporary popular literature, which is part of present day Pakistani popular practices, greatly influencing the sense of sexuality and the construction of masculinity in relation to femininity. The notion of desire is also acknowledged in Islamic texts and their commentaries. These include the types of women, the preparations for sexual acts, and instructions to men for preparing their bodies before an intercourse (Khuri, 82). The popular

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<sup>19</sup> According to Dror Ze'evi's study of desire in the Ottoman period, *Producing Desire: changing Sexual Discourses in the Ottoman Middle east, 1500-1900*, the pre modern manuscripts in the Muslim world were full of erotic and open discourse, which although addressed female desire, but remained male voice. These manuscripts with visual depictions later received greater demands in the West as collectible items, as a result of travelling between the Middle East and the West became frequent with more increasing political and colonial powers of the West. He establish that only those books were printed which were considered useful for people, the idea that the books will be available to people created a sense of self censorship based on the social and political changes that emerged due to new conceptions of gender relations.

<sup>20</sup> Mischief maker, evil, troublesome, Satan, a revolt against God.

<sup>21</sup> Cleansing rituals which included primarily a complete bath, and in the absence of time and/or water resource, a minor ritual with the use of sand or clay. Since it is important that a person would pray five times a day and would not be allowed in the mosque in impure state, therefore much emphasis in the religious texts been laid upon the proper ways it should be done and in how to manage in complicated situations.

Islamic context is further reflected in popular texts available on street stalls. I use the images of these sex manuals for discussion in the thesis, which state and explain the Islamic way of sexual intercourse.

The Pakistani consciousness about terms, concepts, texts and debates, about and around sex and erotica (whether to support it or to constrain it) has been informed by various historical references from early Arabian and Persian upto the Indian subcontinent's literary and religious accounts. To bring historic texts in the discussion of 'obscene' and 'dirty' language and literature, we also include Arabic and Persian literature which has been a part of the imagination of people of the subcontinent. These texts ranged from the philosophical treatise like *Risala fi ilsh* (treatise on love) by Ibn-e-Sina, where love and desire is placed within the Neo Platonic framework where universal force is behind the phenomena of life in order to come back to unify with the One, to the famous *Perfumed Garden*, an 'Arabic Kama sutra' of Shaykh Nafzawi (15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> century according to diverse sources) (Grunebaum, 234). More accounts, to name a few, including, *The Thousands and One Nights*, *Tutinama*, *The Book of Peacock*, Nizami's *Khusrou and Shirin*, *Laila and Majnun*, *Wis and Ramin*, *Book of Songs* of Abu I-Faraj Al Isphahani are examples of early Arabian erotic literature. It is worth noting that the detailed description of sexual acts discussed eloquently by Shaykh Nafzawi in his famous book, range from effects of the coitus on the body, both male and female, to key terms used for sexual parts of both. But the addressee seems to be the male as it is actually about his body and mind that the writer is primarily concerned with and therefore elaborates on the 'correct' way coitus should be achieved in order to attain and maintain a healthy body.

This account on one hand grants equal status to female pleasure and desire for a healthy intercourse, while on the other suggests that if one does not choose ones female partners correctly, in terms of age, nature, and body type, then it can have adverse effects on one's health. But the male body and its types, he maintained, never have any negative effect on women's health. Accounts like these have penetrated popular literature on sex. I suggest that this has caused fear of female sexuality among men as one of the interviewee,

while commenting on the male body and its needs and desires, considered female desire as only secondary. What factors constitute this male desire of controlling female body and sexuality? Is it constituted of fear or anxiety? The section on the recipes for aphrodisiac foods resonates the popular understanding in Pakistani cultural practices. For instance, the use of coriander is considered bad for men as it can negatively impact his sexual desire and thus refrain him from the 'true delights from coitus' (The Glory of Perfumed Garden, 219)<sup>22</sup>.

An interesting segment is to analyze the disjuncture that occurred in history if one looks at the following account where female sexuality and desire is considered important enough to be a part of sacred texts. Some of the Hadith's sources from *Sahih* reflect on the kind of society which allowed discussion on sexuality as a normal every day discourse. To quote one example:

Aisha (Mohammad's wife) reported: The wife of arRifaa al-Qurazi to the Prophet while I was sitting [in the room] and Abu Bakr [Aisha's father, the first caliph as well] was present. She said: 'Oh messenger of God! I had been married to Rifaa and he divorced me and then I married Abdarrahanibn as-Zubair, but, by God, he does not have, o messenger of God, more than this fringe!' and she showed a fringe of her trousers. Her words were heard by Khalid ibn Said who was standing by the door without being asked to enter, and he said to Abu Bakr: 'will you not prevent her from being so candid towards the Messenger of God?' but the messenger of God just smiled and said to her: you would like to return to Rifaa, wouldn't you, that you may taste his sweet honey ('usaila) and he may taste your sweet honey again?' Henceforth it [the fringed trouser] became a custom (sunna). [Sahi al Bukhari: Cairo, 1376/1956]<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> These tips are recommended even today in Pakistan where women and girls are told by their mothers not to add these ingredients into their food if they want men to continue to have sexual appetite. Men also to some extent follow strictly certain kinds of foods and refrain from sour kinds that have negative effects on their performance. I am not sure how much it can be proved scientifically, but it continues to form the myth around male sexuality in Pakistan's popular practice.

<sup>23</sup> "Scribd." Sahih Bukhari Hadiths. <http://www.scribd.com/doc/73481922/56448827-sahih-bukhari-hadiths>, There are many translations and for the references I am quoting this online version, where impotency is used instead of the enjoyment of sexual pleasure. The hadith used above is taken



Many Hadith like the above discuss sexuality and have become part of Pakistani consciousness. The *Book of Marriage* by Ghazzali and *Qubusnama* contrast with each other by creating a difference in marriage, and sexual or erotic pleasures. Ghazzali clearly says that coition has a value of its own and is the one that in its briefest delight arouses in man a longing for the lasting life in the world to come. His interpretation of a verse from a Sura 113:3 of Quran in his famous work *Ihya' 'ulum-din*: 'I betake me for refuge to the Lord ....and against the mischief of the night when it overtaketh me'.

It is important to note how these values and indoctrinations have infiltrated South Asian culture through colonial rule and orthodox Islamic reform movements. The reforms of British Raj like the ban on Sati, the introduction of family laws in both Muslim and Hindu Penal Code, the work of educationists and academics like Katherine Mayo's *Mother India*, translations and commentaries of the *Kamasutra* along with resistant literature produced by orthodox reformist Muslims like Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi's *Bahishti Zewar*<sup>24</sup> all contributed in further complicating the sexualities of this region. The book by Thanvi comprised of ten chapters, written basically to educate and guide Muslim women in reaction to rapidly changing social and cultural mores of Muslims in India during the British Rule. Thanvi envisioned Muslim women as 'quiet, and guarded, doing nothing without reflection, speaking little and weighing the impact of every word.... is cheerful, orderly, clean, systematic. She is not spontaneous, unpredictable, a lively conversationalist, creative or artist – any of the characteristic another culture might consider desirable' (Metcalf, 317). This reformist approach was not limited to Muslims only. Many Hindu reformists working at the same time struggled to reform their society from social and religious cults. Muslim scholarship in India faced an imagined enemy both the British as colonizer

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from the references of the article used in Grunebaum, G. E., *Avivenna's Risaal Fi L-ishq and Courty Love*, Journal of Near Eastern Studies, Vol. XI, October 1952, p.234

<sup>24</sup> Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi wrote this book for Muslim girls and women to educate them on the matters of regulating every day life after their marriage. Although it stresses on the importance of a pious and virtuous woman, the most controversial sections of this book are those which describe child birth. It was strongly suggested not to let any 'missionary' nurse doctor examine the mother in labor. Under circumstances beyond one's control, it was advised to veil the face of the mother if any missionary lady doctor examines her.

and the Hindu as insider, but did not stop there. They critiqued even those cultural practices of Shia Muslims and Sufis which were not puritanical in the strict orthodox sense and resembled somehow the cultural norms of Hindus.

The reformatory measures of British rule in India regarding temple and tomb rituals and cults in the past, and the current modes of surveillance at the Sufi shrines in Pakistan suggests the existence of power of these transgressed activities, which forced the two governing powers to regulate them. Ann Laura Stoler's critical evaluation of orientalist discourse suggesting Western civilization as increasingly becoming restrictive and the colonies serving as their escape to roots in the orientalist tradition and 'remains resonant in their popular forms' (1995), is pivotal in unmasking the consciousness that governs certain ideals of aesthetics in present times. I further expand this debate by looking briefly at the literature from the Indian Subcontinent and the Islamic world that has helped generate sexuality discourse and formulate its popular perception in Pakistan. The books on sexuality abridged from the Sanskrit and English versions with references to Kama sutra, Greek, Hindu and Muslim philosophers are available at a very cheap price on road-side markets and on footpaths on the Mall Road in Lahore on Sunday.



Figure C: Shop near the Lahore Railway Station, which has been selling books on sexuality for the last 70 years.

To investigate the historicization of male desire in the South Asian context, it is pertinent to find parallels in the contemporary cultural practices of popular local ‘German’ health centers in Pakistan, which are also known as ‘*unani*’<sup>25</sup>. These supply aphrodisiacs and sell cures for ‘problems in unhappy sexual life’ and their advertisements on the walls that promise to fulfill fantasies are ubiquitous regardless of rural or urban locations. What are the modes of articulation in such popular forms? In the presence of explicit sexual practices, the silence, dismissal or silent acceptance of these scripts has become so obvious, to posit Kimmel’s claim, that it does not acknowledge any debate, despite their overwhelming presence in the public sphere. However, availability is another matter as several kinds of aphrodisiacs and Viagra are available in these shops, and the capsules are sold for 150 rupees. The CDs come with comprehensive information on all kinds of homeopathic herbal oils and medicines, and also other chemical based medicines for various sexual problems and diseases, all with a promise of increasing sexual potency. Kamasutra, being the most popular text on sex, has found its way in crude printing, available on the footpath of the old part of Lahore at the very

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<sup>25</sup> Charu Gupta explains how the term *unani* changed from its most authentic form of healing during Mughal times to present day derogatory association with ago old, non-scientific medicinal methodologies. Seema Alvi also notes the healing and local medicines in constructing social structure of people.

cheap price of a few rupees. The text is usually a simple summary of some of the 'key elements' of Kamasutra. To link the influences across the region, following the study of Charu Gupta one can note that, 'printed sex manuals in Hindi made up a genre that saw substantial growth in early-twentieth-century UP' and that 'Aligarh and Moradabad appear to have been thriving centers of publications' (2005, 53). The title need not acknowledge that it is a summarized version of Kama Sutra, instead naming it 'a guide to happy marriage', 'a key to successful marriage', and, 'things that you should know before marriage'. These texts come with some mechanical illustrations displaying certain postures etc. and they continue to give credit to authors who were Hindus, as a sign of authenticity. These popular literatures show a strange trajectory of the continuation of sexual discourse from the last two centuries both within Indian and Muslim popular literature. The popular sexual discourse assert simultaneously an obvious disconnect with sexuality and erotic discourse of the last two centuries which form the psyche of present day.

### **The Significance**

This research is envisioned to contribute to a burgeoning scholarship on Pakistan, which is tinted towards studying systems of terrorism, extremism and the politics (Iqtadar, 2011; Toor, 2011) and contrast it with another perspective of studying contemporary Pakistani society through the lens of obscenity. A study of new media technologies and sexuality discourse and of the strategies people employ to subvert the overt ideologies prevailing the social order will benefit this growing scholarship on Pakistan. Furthermore, this dissertation seeks to contribute to a large pool of cinema and media studies, which has developed a historiographic approach to understanding Bollywood cinema within its regional context, positioning the partition of 1947 as a major turning point for the cinema industry of India in analyzing the influence of Hindi-Urdu culture of North India before Partition, in which Lahore, the regional center of film, separated from Bombay (Gazdar 1997; Vasudevan, 2010; Viswanath and Malik 2009; Ahmed, 1992; Navill, 1993). These studies, along with others that explicate the role of courtesans,

singers and poets of 'Islamicate culture of bazaar' (Vasudevan 2010), form the foundation of this research in connecting it with recent transformation of Pakistani cinema, while connecting it with the past tradition of *mujra* and present day *mujra* videos sensibility produced due to the emergence of new media technologies.

Theater and performance are intertwined with the presence of courtesan and *nautch* girls (Naville 2009) who were initially associated with nobility and resided in close quarters with people in power until the British Raj dismantled their privileged and powerful position. Their displacement led them first to theater performances, singing and dancing and then consequently they found a lucrative livelihood in Indian film industry (Vasudevan, 2010) This thesis contributes to this body of scholarship which positions the courtesan in the center stage of earlier cinema, by analyzing the trajectory reverses during an oppressive time in Pakistan when the film industry took its last breaths and the cinema gave way to live theaters. The dances in the films became live on theater in the form of the *mujra* and then appeared on DVD and CDs. The sensual romantic duets songs and dances of the films gave way to lascivious erotic *mujra* dance movements, and here it is connected with a growing body of work on pornography and obscenity in South Asia. In Hoek's study, cut-pieces become the visible and invisible modes of producing desire, sometimes taken as a commentary on Bangladeshi polity, its failing systems, and censorship. My thesis, heavily influenced by Hoek's study, brings forward how the cut-pieces practice of censoring films by the censor board in 70's in Pakistan has helped developed an aesthetic which led towards digitally collaged *mujra* dance videos.

South Asian Media studies has taken the task of addressing the emergence of VCR and DVD culture, emanating from piracy networks and new media technologies of the present times, shaping a new understanding of audience relationship, notion of citizenship and legalities, popular fan clubs and shifting/mobile cinema theater (Liang, 2005; Sundaram, 2010; Vasudevan, 2010). I demonstrate how people continue to practice their cinematic tradition which has transformed from cinema theater into drama

performances with mujra dances and then onto video culture and net cafes despite a severely orthodox environment. Complementing existing scholarship, this research aims to fill in the gaps regarding the significance of these periods in fully comprehending the transforming role of media production and shifting audience sites in Pakistan. This research is at a unique turning point where it connects the past tradition of cinema with recent transformative technological shifts; it also simultaneously embarks on linking Brian Larkin's analysis of media piracy networks, originating from South Asia including Pakistan and Middle East to Nigeria (2008).

Even in the burgeoning studies on South Asian Media Studies, which continues to be dominated by studies of Bollywood, Pakistani cinema remains under studied probably because it is 'dying a slow death' (Malik). The survey studies of Pakistani cinema (Gazdar, 1997; Khan, 2010, Dadi, 2009) demonstrate the socio-political milieu which contributed to the coming of this slow end, however, celebrate and recognize many moments in Pakistani cinema. They specifically focus on the heroic image of subaltern, as in the case of *Maula Jutt*<sup>26</sup>, and his relationship with oppressed society, especially in the times of military dictatorship. Khan and Ahmed deliberate the role of violent consumption and seduction as a natural consequence of a rigid political environment, with little attention to audience response, and people's aspirations (2010). However, this research rather than positing a direct and simple approach needs a more complex analysis in which disjuncture with traditional erotic and sexual discourse, and clever manipulative approach is discussed which demonstrate the power and the agency of people in not only surviving, but also expressing their desire in such political conditions. The consumption of such images and certain perceptions of the erotic desires interrogated by Mankekar (2010) allowed me to use it methodically to form an analysis of consumers' perception of their desires, since audience/consumers do not occupy a public space like in Cinema Theater, and pose limitation to my methodology.

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<sup>26</sup> A film released in 1976. I have discussed this film and the notion of hero in the third chapter.

Films are often used as a metaphor to study the society we are focusing on, the fandom shifting from romantic hero to action hero and from idealistic to realistic and violent stories. The shifts in the story of films provides us with a nuanced understanding of the changing political scenario in society, such as from Nehruvian idealism to Indra Gandhi's pragmatic and intolerant rule, and political tensions between neighboring countries like India and Pakistan through a study of films on partition, borders and wars and so on (Gazdar, 1997; Dudra, 2008; Bharat, 2008).

My research is intended primarily for Pakistani academics and students of cultural and visual/media studies, but my work will also contribute to the growing international body of works on new media in the Muslim world. Although Internet usage in Pakistan is a rapidly growing phenomenon, it still has not been recorded and analyzed in any academic discourse on Pakistan. The negative effects of the Internet on undergraduate students and access to digital libraries among female students of Islamic University are some of the topics covered in the research conducted by some academics in Pakistan.<sup>27</sup> The need to widen the discourse on sexuality, which is not just narrowly looking at sexuality from the feminist perspective, is needed for a serious understanding of the subject and changing tracks of Pakistani contemporary culture.

Nonetheless, as mentioned above, it aims to link research findings with the larger international audience, especially the Muslim world, in order to understand the complexities within which Muslim societies are negotiating with new media. These societies are busy, not only in establishing their political agency within and outside their state run ideological apparatus, but also in engaging with sexual pleasure and entertainment, often with the help of the same media. Many scholars, including Charles Hirschkind, engage with the Muslim public space and the use of new media. He focuses on the politics of new media and its uses in the Muslim public sphere where a sense of piety in the public sermons is constructed through cassette sermons etc. In

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<sup>27</sup> "Find Health articles." Effects excessive internet use undergraduate students Pakistan. [http://www.find-health-articles.com/rec\\_pub\\_16780397-effects-excessive-Internet-use-undergraduate-students-pakistan.htm](http://www.find-health-articles.com/rec_pub_16780397-effects-excessive-Internet-use-undergraduate-students-pakistan.htm)

many other scholarly works, Islam is 'shown to thrive and develop not in reaction against but instead along with information technology' (Meyer and Moors, 5). Hirschkind establishes the Muslims' use of new media as a way of promoting and practicing in a digitally pious mode, 'space of communal reflexivity and action understood as necessary for perfecting and sustaining the totality of practices upon which an Islamic society depends' (2006). Instead, in my research, I claim that new media is also enabling Muslims to express their sexual desires in a way that helps them transcend the ideological discourse established by the state and society, within the same 'totality' of practices which is not recognized by any of the scholarship on new media and the Muslim world.

I aim to highlight aspects of new media which are peculiar in their own right and provide an agency to the Muslim masculine sexual discourse. I have used the term 'soft porn' and pornography to discuss Pakistani/Punjabi dance videos and to examine how these are being used in Pakistan. In the fifth chapter where I use the term 'Muslim porn', it is to make sure that the fluidity of use of such terms, its acceptability and ease of use is reflected by the presence of these terms on YouTube, which is the largest site for archiving and reading visual material and their texts. I use it to highlight the discourse that manifests sexuality, and brings back the debate to the notion of the public Muslim sphere in the new media. I introduce this angle to Charles Hirschkind's scholarship of piety and the new media in the Muslim world. By using the terms Muslim public sphere and Muslim world, which appear to be loosely structured and generalized, I try to connect existing scholarship with the larger debates of infiltration of new media in Muslim countries and how people in these countries relate to and use new media including social websites for radicalization, for their personal, religious and political outlets and for education and dissemination of their point of view/ideologies. As the identity of being Muslim remains in the foreground while they continue to indulge in sexually explicit material on YouTube, this study appropriately examines the dichotomies present in a society where



YouTube has been banned since September 2012<sup>28</sup> due to the presence of a blasphemous video. However, people still find ways to access YouTube for watching porn videos. My study connects the findings from this 'Muslim public sphere' or 'Muslim world' and the various aspect of diversity in sexual expressions, a product of rich historical and cultural experiences of people from the Muslim world that has not been addressed before.

## ***Section 2***

Before I go into the detailed fieldwork and my analysis, I use this section to clarify some of the terms and their uses in this thesis, and explicate to avoid any misunderstandings that might emerge due to many contexts in which these terms have been in use by different scholars.

### **Masculinity/mardangi**

The term masculinity is translated in Urdu as *mardangi*. Mardangi has a different meaning in each setting as one can infer from the popular expressions used in daily life. What constitutes mardangi and where it is threatened is defined in nuances rather than in any fixed definitive meaning. This aspect becomes clear in the way people respond when posed with this question of masculinity. To some, the responsibility of a man towards his family is called *mardangi*. A man who can look after his family on his own terms is a *mard* (man). For many the word *mard* or a man means freedom and access to sexual expression. The terms mardangi is always understood in relation to its feminine counterpart. Masculinity is reflected best here through its expressions of fantasy and desire, which are projected on the layers of popular culture through overt patriarchal norms. It shows the shifting nature of representation of male body and its relationship with the constant change in the nature of masculinity. As I have mentioned above, describing the term *mardangi* constitutes different meanings in different contexts. Men's freedom of desire and its expression is complex in view of the way they like to be sexually ridiculed by women performing on stage and

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<sup>28</sup> YouTube ban lifted in Pakistan for 3 minutes. December 30, 2012. Accessed: 20, March 2013. [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/30/world/asia/youtube-ban-lifted-in-pakistan-for-3-minutes.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/30/world/asia/youtube-ban-lifted-in-pakistan-for-3-minutes.html?_r=0),

during mujra performance. Furthermore, the way men feel open to boasting about their sexuality while at the same time being conscious of sharing any sexual problem, fearing ridicule from their peers. The popular expression that *mard kabhi boorha nahi hota* (man never gets old), is stated all the time in common conversations in the presence of a large number of advertisements around the city regarding male sexual problems and their remedies through German Health Centers, and *Unani* medicines.

## **Desire**

According to the definition of the University of Chicago's online glossary of keywords of Theories of Media, the word fantasy is most often referred to as a "mental apprehension of an object of perception; the faculty by which this is performed" and further as 'the fact or habit of deluding oneself by imaginary perceptions or reminiscences'.<sup>29</sup> It further elaborates the term as a mediator between desire and reality. According to this reference Fantasy and its many derivations originate from the Greek word 'phantasia' which literally means "to make visible". To understand the consumption of these mujra dance videos in an overtly religious society, fantasy and the ethos of the *bazaar* (market) where the CDs are circulated, need to be understood in comparison with Kajri Jain's study of Popular Calendar Art, the implication of the sacred image and its efficacy. Jain discusses the ethos of the bazaar and elaborates on the categories of taste by diverting from *Distinction* of Bourdieu, while maintaining that the deployment of such categories perpetuate class distinctions, suggesting that the value of the popular, which might be weaker, but nonetheless, has not been able to distinguish itself from the 'realm of ethical judgment' let alone supersede it (Jain 1998, 151). Therefore she focused her study on the realm of ethos in which the images are implicated in the circulation of power and desire.

Slavoj Zizek explains the relationship of desire and fantasy in psychoanalysis as 'desire is not something given in advance, but something

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<sup>29</sup> Fantasy. Online Glossary, University of Chicago. Accessed: December 09, 2011. <http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/fantasy.htm>

that has to be constructed – and it is precisely the role of fantasy to give the coordinates of the subject's desire, to specify its object, to locate the position the subject assumes in it' (2002, 6). If it is only through fantasy that the subject is constituted as desiring: '*through fantasy, we learn how to desire* (ibid.), then how do we know the fantasy of consumers of mujra dances? Our object of desire determines who we are at the core of our desire. By definition, desire is something that is never satisfied and fulfilled in reality, or it ceases to be desire. It is this very essence of lack at the heart of desire that ensures we continue to desire. It is this theoretical framework which underlies the analysis of the unlimited urge for desiring more and more mujras and the fulfillment of fantasies.

### **Ambivalence and Pakistani discursive practices**

I have used the term ambivalence to refer to the pattern of inconsistency and uncertainty. The thesis demonstrates that in the presence of clear rules and regulations, moral codes of conduct and a value system, common people and authorities representing the Law and State, including the police, judges and lawyers always find a way around to do things that they want to do. These acts of defiance or transgression are understood by everyone and are constantly negotiated. This realm of inconsistency in practice and the theorization of this conduct is what I term ambivalence or ambiguity. The moral and the ethical positions on the question of female desire, taken up by the consumers and producers of mujra videos are not used when male desire and its sexual fulfillment are articulated. Several questions are merged to formulate and construct an analysis addressing the above stated problems which are situated in the everyday cultural and social milieu of Pakistan. The virtual sites of mujra dance on YouTube, and in Lahore remain the primary focus of this thesis.

### **Dichotomies**

When one closely analyzes the practice, consumption and discursive practices of *mujra* dance videos, the inevitable encounter is with numerous dichotomies in Pakistani society that come to the foreground, which may be seen as double standards, hypocrisies or negotiations. For a clearer

understanding of the question of masculinity, desire, and new media practices, I have categorized these dichotomies into three thematic groups for discussion of the key themes of thesis. During my research, the foremost recurring dichotomy that emerged was the notion of female sexuality in relation to male sexuality (also see Saeed, 2011; Shaheed, 2011; Jalal, 1991; Meyer 1989). Fauzia Saeed in her accounts of women from the red light area of Lahore demonstrates the boundaries between a woman who is pious and domesticated, and the woman who is a sex worker and is present in the public sphere. This simplistic binary does not offer an insight into the negotiations of women in the public sphere who are professional and are not sex workers. The struggle of women in establishing their independent citizenship is still categorized into the bad or fallen category (Jalal, 1991; Ahmed, 2010; Shaheed 2011). When I use the notion of binary, I am aware of the diverse practices of female participation in the public space. On the contrary, it is important to note that my research and analysis highlight how men continue to believe in this binary.

When one analyzes the content of songs of most of the *mujra* dances, one encounters that the lyricist (who is always a male), writes them in a way that characterizes the dancer as a very expressive woman regarding her sexual desires. She boldly verbalizes the whole song whose lyrics are much cherished and fantasized, and moves to the hero, or the male audience in the case of stage *mujras*. In contrast, many interviews of male consumers and/or producers of these videos suggest that their expectation and assumption of domesticated woman are to conceal her desire, or she would be labeled as a vulgar woman. This contrast is based on the ideological belief in the binary of private/public, noble/vulgar, and of a woman who expresses her desire versus a woman who restrains her desire<sup>30</sup>. The expected sex life with a housewife is a sign of controlled desire and of a dull sexual life, which also formulates a central part of jokes and ridicule among males.

Another significant dichotomy over these videos forms a complex web of discursive practices that help both constitute and operate this industry by

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influencing the State and its institutions along with the press. This is highlighted by instances of CD burning by shopkeepers who sell these sexually illicit materials. This self-initiated event on the part of shopkeepers was an attempt to appease political groups like the Tehrik-e-Taliban.<sup>31</sup>

The dichotomy prevalent among consumers which I encountered in most of my interviews was between the notion of pious ethical values and their practices in sexual entertainment. The distinction between desire, religion and business is very clear and they have devised a way of repentance so that they are considered both good Muslims as well as have their share of fun in their lifetime.

### **Religious ideologies or religious groups**

I have used, on number of occasions, terms that refer to a religious mindset, religious extremists groups, or religious ideologue. I am fully aware of the problems with generalizing and imagining a group through one's own understanding and a clear elaboration of these terms is based on Humaira Iqtidar's analysis of Islamists, a growing popular term (2011, 100). The explanations describe how religious groups with political goals have distinguished themselves from the traditional religious communities or groups and therefore, should be termed more as Islamists who believe in changing Muslim society through 'real' Islamic teachings without shying away from politics. She gives an analysis of a few political groups, who are also involved in social activism, jihad and militancy. The problem in this research arises when I mention the attitudes of people and their concerns regarding Islamic behavior, even though they are not openly part of any acclaimed Islamist group. Those behaviours which I mention, are mostly an outcome of the long Islamization process that has made Pakistani society an exclusively religious society. (Nelson 2011, 2006).

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<sup>31</sup> Inside the porn industry. The Tribune.  
<http://tribune.com.pk/story/9990/inside-the-porn-industry-pakistan/>

### ***Section 3***

#### **Methodology and ethics**

Being involved for the last few years in art practice, visual research, teaching art at various institutions and community centers, I feel very close to the cultural scene of the city where I was born. My Masters' thesis from the University of New South Wales also dealt with the cultural and every day visual and material culture of Lahore's figurative tradition. I have built on these experiences for the current research with an understanding of my limitations as a female researcher in a patriarchal society. In approaching the subject of masculinity and male desire, the challenge was to transcend to a comfort level where it became easy for the interviewees to discuss several aspects of their desire, fantasies, and other issues regarding their sexuality. It is also appropriate to express here that almost all the names of the consumers, shopkeepers, distributors, and producers I have used in the thesis are pseudonyms. When I offered them the option that their real name would not be printed anywhere, almost every one, with the exception of dancers, singers, a Punjabi film writer and the lyricist agreed to talk to me.

One of the strategies that I employed was to engage two male assistants to help me develop my networks in the field with select groups. It was very important to be introduced by a person who was also their confidante. One of the assistants had close ties with many people in the Punjabi Film industry. He claimed to be a sex worker and had worked with *Heejras* of Lahore. He had an intimate understanding of the many facets of cultural formations and was also involved in conducting safe sex and sexual health workshops for sex workers, and therapy workshops for heterosexual males. He was exceptionally helpful in introducing me as a serious researcher from SOAS who also taught in Lahore. My background i.e. being from the same city, combined together with the fact that I was conducting this research from an international institution, added 'authenticity' while keeping some distance from their immediate livelihood. The ease with which I could interact with the interviewees was amazing as they reflected a dire need of expressing something which had not been taken into account seriously

before. I felt a similar comfort level on a number of occasions when I was invited to share my research in an informal seminar format at a public gallery, *Nairang*, and at LUMS University's social science department. The audience comprised of mostly young students, both male and female, from various social backgrounds. I was told by some attendants, and later on through email by the class lecturer that the discussion was very rich in terms of how it generated discussions among students who would otherwise remain enclosed in their respective shells. After we had discussed these dichotomies, sexual behaviors and mujra dance videos, almost every one expressed that the current environment was stifling and felt the need to be able to express their ideas and emotions on such taboo issues in a serious academic environment. These experiences were quite reassuring as the methodological approach I had adopted enabled others to speak quite comfortably to me.

Connecting with where I had used Bakhtin's dialogic approach, the interviews were a kind of interaction where the interviewee also wanted to understand my perspective. It was not easy to discuss my point of view because I did not want to slant the angle of the discussion, though it was important to make sure that they understood my position. It was important for me to make sure that my research's non-judgmental approach regarding their practices was conveyed through the way I posed questions. Once I would gain their confidence, their behavior would change dramatically. In the initial meetings, by and large, they started by condemning their practices of indulging and consuming sexually explicit materials, but after learning that I was not using 'feminist' theoretical framework where I held their practices as exploitative of female sexuality, they would transform to a relaxed friendly way with occasional small laughter and chuckles. I have deliberately refrained from using an exclusive feminist theory in order to avoid the already established perspective of the exploitative element of use and abuse in semi porn dance videos. The lens of feminism limits the analysis to positioning the role of females in a patriarchal society. The agency of the female voice and its responses are not included in the current analysis. Having said that, I did attempt to use and analyze what others said, with my

subjectivity active in structuring the direction of the questions, without making large claims or judgments on these practices on the basis of my gender. Where I embarked on deconstructing the binaries of male and female regarding their sexual desires, I was careful not to use a theoretical framework to examine feminine sexuality versus masculinity. The task was not to understand the masculine desire in relation to its binary situation, but instead, to use new media and the popular cultural theoretical scope to lay down the structures and networks that help constitute, formulate and reinforce female performance in the public space of a patriarchal society.

I take into consideration the notion of 'dialogue' in Bakhtin's terms (Harold, 2000) as a methodological approach insofar as it has helped me address the very complex issues surrounding masculinity and male desire. I do not present myself as an objective researcher seeking some 'truths' by my 'participatory observations', but, on the other hand, like Bakhtin's dialogue, I approach the informants with full realization of my culture, gender and other backgrounds, and interact with my 'subjects' as a meeting of two opinionated people who do not necessarily agree but try to discuss, interact and understand each other's point of view. Therefore, my methodological approach, primarily, is based on the theory of the performance of the researcher, creating a dialogue by intervening in the worlds of representation, while being fully aware of my position as a female researcher investigating issues around masculinity, particularly complexities of representation of sexuality. I still believe that many areas of the query remain silent because it was beyond my capacity to transcend the gender divide and interact as one with them. I have used an ethno-methodological approach in reading the text of the interviews, where I am interested in what people say, do and utter, rather than assuming and interpreting something that exists beyond the accounts provided (May, 141). When I compared some of the discussions, which a male student of mine conducted for me in my absence, there was an obvious difference in the participant's general attitudes. The freedom with which they talked was reminiscent of the freedom that the consumers conveyed their emotions and ideas on YouTube, because it



guaranteed oblivion. Another male assistant was my previous student, who helped me network with shopkeepers and producers of the *mujra* dance videos. He was the perfect assistant for this task as being a consumer he used to visit these shops and net cafes regularly.

The criterion for selecting these CDs/*mujra* dance videos for my analysis is not based only on the popularity of the CD but also the content. As Bill Nicholas argues, while arguing the significance of certain films in history due to their innovative aspects and not their popularity, 'common sense tells us that important films for film history must have been important films for their audiences'. He further explains how some very significant films based on their importance regarding social and formal aspects, were seldom popular in their time. (1991, xviii). The significance of these videos is the time factor. It is a possibility that this is the beginning of a new style of porn dance videos in Pakistan where one will continue to see more male bodies and be able to trace the development of the genre. The other possibility is that this is only one fleeting moment where for some reason due to the availability of this technology to lay persons, one is able to witness how males would view their own bodies if they made themselves subject to the gaze of camera.

One approach to understanding the notion of obscenity that I found quite interesting was the study of pornographic "cut-pieces" in Bangladeshi Cinema by Lotte Hoek. Hoek traced the entire more than a yearlong experience of production and consumption of cut-piece film. She studied the entire first script writing sessions up to their arrival in the village cinemas (2013). Contrary to her approach, I entered the field with a plan to understand the market, production, and consumption by analyzing broadly the whole infrastructure that is operational in a country like Pakistan, while focusing on Lahore. Therefore my methodological approach is more closely in resonance with Brian Larkin's study of piracy networks and digital VCD in Nigeria. However, in content, Hoek's findings reflect similar concerns as is argued in my thesis's third and fourth chapters.

For the purpose of methodology, this research relied on multi-sited methodological approach to gather and generate data (Marcus, 1995). As stated earlier, my research focus is primarily on how masculinity is constructed and understood by using digital technologies, which has helped form the genre of soft porn mujra dance videos. The question itself generates two different sites of analysis, which means that I needed to focus not only on the net café goers, production, and circulation of the videos, but also the Pakistani community viewing these videos on the Internet. The approach that I employed to access information and generated data and to develop a dialogue with the viewers in order to make a comparative analysis of the findings was to acquire as many videos as much so as to analyze the trends of the last few years. The speed with which these trends changed was amazing but I had to stop acquisitions by the middle of 2011 so as to be able to set a parameter for analysis.

Later, I selected videos from YouTube and then recorded the discussions under these video posts. The comparative analysis of the discussion that took place provided me with a vast array of information on how viewers respond differently if shown homemade semi professional, sex scandal or professionally made videos as an expression of sexuality in performance. The analysis in the last chapter examines how the viewers respond to different representations of sexuality, which further reinforces their notion of masculinity. This comparative analysis helped in assessing how masculinity is constituted in relation to femininity in a cultural context where complexities are further highlighted. It is very important to keep in mind the debates around cultural analysis and its interpretations. The role of cultural analyst, as Mark Hobart argues, while criticizing the much-celebrated Geertz cultural analysis, is blurred by the constructions of the analyst of the understanding of the constructions of the subjects' constructions of their point of view (2000, 12).

I also use the approach of Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Taylor (1997), on documentary filmmaking and the promises they make in depicting reality, to structure my interviews. The gaps which are present in the not so structured

interviews are sometimes more interesting to watch. No matter how deeply we design the structure of the interview, there are many instances when one learns more about the area one is researching through informal discussion. I had also noticed that while making the film, I could not fully think ahead of it. Thus, I used an open ended approach in my interviewing. During the entire research period, this open-ended approach made me reflect constantly on the notions of how I was negotiating the terms with which I approached the object of research. Who my audience was and what difference was this research going to make? Crossing boundaries in terms of gender if not the culture geographically, interviewing people and then analyzing the comments posted independently on YouTube, required a lot of analytical and critical appraisal of the techniques and this special genre.

### **The Structure of the Thesis**

Chapter One, *The Practices of Sexualities, and the Dichotomies in the Contemporary Cultural Sphere*, analyzes the notion of hypocrisy and double standards of the morality debate within practitioners of the *mujra* dance videos. I discuss how new media and technology are enabling men from the Muslim world to indulge in sexual entertainment, therefore making the new media not only an agent of their ideological presence in the local, but also in the global world. By conducting this analysis, it is inevitable to bring forth the complexities and layers of dichotomies that one recognizes as prevalent in the practices of these illicit dances. Chapter Two examines the actual production of *mujra* dance videos. After setting the cultural context and historical positioning of *mujra* dance practice, the descriptive narrative takes the reader through the nuances of making these videos. Chapter Three, *Reading the Content of Mujra Dance Videos and Masculine Desire*, analyzes contents of the lyrics and the dance form respectively. I present this argument to posit the complexities of heterosexual male desire and fantasies in direct conjunction with the binary of 'private' and 'public' woman's sexuality in Pakistani society.

Chapter Four, *Mujra Dance Video and its Distribution: Changing Centers of Desire*, explores the circulation and distribution of these videos.

This chapter also examines the routes and infrastructure of circulation, distribution and the notion of piracy as a necessary ingredient in the production and flourishing of this informal industry. In Chapter Five, *Mujra Dance Videos: Consumerism and Narratives of Desire*, I analyze the perceptions of consumers of these *mujra* dances. The notion of consumption and its preferences are studied among a cross section of society, across class divide, age groups, spaces, and locations, along with consumption's negotiation with religion, health, morality, and feminine desire. *Virtual Sexuality: Mujra Videos on You Tube*, Chapter Six, examines digitally made *mujra* dance videos uploaded on YouTube and the wider community's interaction in virtual space regarding these homemade and/or semi professional videos. After careful deliberations of the posts and comments of consumers of such videos on YouTube, I argue that the virtual space provides agency to consumers in which public sexuality discourse continues. Here, the texts of the comments posted under these videos are read in this chapter as a form of new media. The analysis reveals that the new media space is actually in essence a continuation of contradictions and social behavioral patterns operating in the physical public space, which I have presented in earlier chapters.

I argue in this dissertation that during the last ten years the production of semi porn *mujra* dance videos has not only infiltrated the social web, but has also made them accessible to people of all ages and backgrounds at a very low price. The user-friendly aspect of digital technology has helped transform it into a full-grown industry, where the production, circulation, and a huge database of porn videos and semi porn *mujra* dance videos are handled through various channels. A huge and growing consumption of these videos is primarily due to the availability of these semi porn dance videos at Internet café's and virtual space like YouTube. This informal industry has sometimes faced significant protests by religious extremist groups, but the public continues to celebrate and consume these videos in their private spheres.

This thesis examines the transformative period in the long tradition of more than two centuries of *mujra* dance through the fusion of digital technology. The sites of desire, *kothas* (a stage for the dancer) are replaced with Internet cafés and virtual sites like YouTube. The traditional circular seated formation around the female dancer is replaced with clicks, icons and search paths on the flat screen of the computer. I envision that this current study will act as a springboard in triggering further debates and bringing more interesting material into wider international scholarship. It is therefore critical to document and analyze this phenomenon in order to generate a debate within and outside a Pakistani cultural context.

## Chapter 1

## The practices of sexuality, public discourse and the dichotomies in the contemporary cultural sphere of Lahore



fig. 1.1 : women section of Jamaat-i-Islami protesting against FoxNews in 2010.

*The Muslim country, which has banned content on at least 17 websites to block offensive and blasphemous material, is the world's leader in online searches for pornographic material, FoxNews.com has learned.<sup>32</sup>*

*There are 1.5 to 1.8 billion Internet users worldwide and Pakistan has only 5 to 8 million Internet users, less than 0.5% of global users and Internet penetration is less than 5% of total population, Wahaj us Siraj, spokesman for Internet Service Providers Association of Pakistan (ISPAK), said in a statement issued here on Friday.<sup>33</sup>*

*Therese Lim who works for Google' communications and Public Affairs Southeast Asia team said, "We do our best to provide accurate data and to provide insights into broad search patterns, but the results for a given query, such as those reported in this story from Pakistan, may contain inaccuracies because the sample size is too small for the results to be statistically sound."<sup>34</sup>*

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<sup>32</sup> Morgan, Kelli. "No. 1 Nation in Sexy Web Searches? Call it Pornistan". FoxNews.com, July 13, 2010.  
<http://www.foxnews.com/world/2010/07/12/data-shows-pakistan-googling-pornographic-material/>

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.paktribune.com/news/index.shtml?229670>

<sup>34</sup> "Pakistan top on porn search Google denies". Dawnnews.com.  
[http://news.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/news/sci-tech/pakistan-top-on-porn-search-google-denies-jd-03,](http://news.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/news/sci-tech/pakistan-top-on-porn-search-google-denies-jd-03)

This chapter examines the presence and use of sexually explicit mujra dance videos in Lahore, and its discursive practices through the lens of contradictions encountered during the field research. The text above is only a glimpse into a wider discourse of sexuality in Pakistan, which is complex, and manifests ways with which people use maneuvering techniques to assert their agency within the power structure of state and religious ideology. This Chapter is primarily engaged in investigating these negotiations and maneuvering technologies located within the discursive practices of mujra dance videos. I argue that a major part of 'aesthetic formation' of these negotiations, primarily by male citizens, are situated in the imagined sense of Muslim nationhood, which claims piety despite indulgence in illicit sexual practices. The complexities are evident through contradicting approaches, One of which continues to use the morality debate to establish a sense of a good religious citizenship and another that altogether denies any presence and use of sexual practices, and lastly I assert, is the piety overtly claimed by practitioners in the face of overwhelming use of illicit sexual practices. These dichotomies or contradictions constitute the sexual discourse and manifest complexities in the cultural identity of Pakistan.

I understand the significance of the contradictions, referred to in this dissertation as dichotomies, for a comprehensive relationship of people with state and its ideology, religion, and sexual desire. It is evident through the examination of research data that people assert their agency successfully to fulfill their sexual desire, leaving the state as a weak apparatus while people use their agency to counter techniques of control and governmentality. In my

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On 12<sup>th</sup> October 2010 US-based Fox News reported Pakistani Internet consumers as the highest Internet pornography consumers in the world, based on the data generated by Google trends. This news created an uproar in Pakistani print media and consequently protests by religious groups who condemned it as western media and its propagandist dispositions against Islam and Pakistan. In a response to the news, Internet Service Providers Association of Pakistan declared this report inaccurate since the data was based on a very small sample size of users. Consequently a Google spokesperson had to clarify the matter by affirming views of ISPAK.



investigation of sexuality discourse and peoples' relationship with the state in Pakistan, the period of military ruler, Zia-ul-Haq, the religious orthodox rule, I find that despite not having any direct correlation, it was during the same period that we started seeing the abundance and thrust of sexually explicit materials. Similarly, I assert that we see the power of media boom that defied boundaries in the form of piracy networks, presenting the state as a weak player, which was also instrumental in promoting these very media technologies along with its support for religious indoctrination through textbooks and other materials. This chapter draws heavily from the theoretical framework developed by Ravi Sundaram about piracy networks, and Lisa Wadeen's political analysis of symbols inscribed in cultural practices of everyday in the Islamic world, including Yemen and Syria. While situating this research in the famous electronic market of Lahore, Hall Road, I set about inquiring as to how does one negotiate the existence and the practice of sexually explicit videos while simultaneously claiming to be a pious Muslim? How do the interlocutors, the agents of desire, view and perceive public space versus private space for the manifestation of sexual desire? How do they imagine the public/private binary correlating with female desire, where an active and assertive woman is desired in a public space while a submissive and complaint woman is respected and appreciated in a private realm of domesticity? The issue of morality and religiosity as a meaningful cultural practice and technique emerged frequently during the field research of mujra videos in Lahore. Almost everyone held a moralist position and emphasized western culture's influences on the practice of these videos, but later on the same interviewees articulated their desires. Denying the use of sexual materials and stressing piety as a religious code suggests a similar pattern to the debate arising from the issue of pornographic material indulgence by Pakistanis stated by Fox News.

The denial of explicit sexual practices and the insistence on morality not only signals that individual behavior has double standards, but also indicates the silence of a state which is failing in propagating its national ideology in the face of media influx (Sundaram 2010). This silence of state, in

my thesis, is articulated as a perpetrator of a double standards and values. By following the notion of denial, the practitioners of mujra videos, are in a subtle way 'complying' inevitable to the governing tools of the state (Wadeen 2013, 9). Later in this chapter, I interrogate the state of denial and self-deception as articulated by David Runciman, (2008, 51), where one learns to hide passionate self-love to the extent that one forgets that it is concealed and not real virtue. These negotiations articulate within the multiple modernity spheres which according to Kamali Masoud, include new media and technology, a city infrastructure with a parallel pirate economy, and an inefficient law and order situation, all of which are being explored and experienced by the Islamic world (2009). This then, gives rise to the question of how technology aids the process of emergence of such sexually explicit material in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The queries posed in this chapter help to address the main question of how male desire is manifested through complex negotiations. I use the term negotiations to explain unarticulated compromised modes with which people understand and find ways to articulate, directly or indirectly, their personal whims within the social structures. These complex negotiations are then explored through the lens of male desire and its consumption of mujra dance videos and the new media and digital technologies that help the consumers express their desire in an exclusive way.

I have divided the chapter into two sections. The first section examines the urban geography of Mall Road, a central main road in Lahore constructed during the British times, with major government institutions and commercial centers. The one and half kilometer stretch of Mall Road maps the real space over which the negotiations with sexual desire takes place, primarily because of Hall Road, an electronic market and center of mujra video production, and its close proximity with institutions including the Punjab Assembly, the Lahore High Court, and the Civil Lines Police Station. By looking at the piracy networks that help this electronic market flourish, I examine the presence of mujra and porn videos against dominant religious ideology that emerged during the military rule of Zia-ul-Haq from 1977-1988. I highlight the

dichotomous relationship of the state with its citizen and consequently citizen's negotiations with the state and its overt ideology for the fulfillment of sexual desire.

The second section of the chapter closely examines the dichotomies and hypocrisies which are a direct result of the interplay of the dominant religious belief system with male sexual desire and the close and complex physical proximity of law enforcing institutes with centers of sexual desires, discussed in the first section. I further divide this section into three sub-sections to closely examine several kinds of dichotomies prevalent in the sexual practices of mujra dance videos. This section critically reviews people's sexual practices and their sense of piety, female desire, and negotiations with everyday issues, including law and religious ideology.

## ***Section 1***

### ***Public Spaces, Sexual Practices and State Ideology***

Bustling with traffic and people, Hall Road is the main electronics market of Lahore. The British built four huge halls along the road for local public meetings and exhibitions. One can still see the colonial architecture and their traces present around this market between the electric cables and behind advertisement hoardings on the facades of these buildings. Transformed into commercial buildings the electronic goods market is full of retailers and wholesalers' shops of branded and locally assembled televisions, music systems and legal and pirated softwares and video businesses. Zaitoon Plaza, along with other plazas like Dar-ul-Rehmat, is one of the earliest, biggest, and most important plazas in Hall Road, providing pirated foreign CDs and DVDs at the cheapest price in the whole city. Several floors of this building are clustered with small shops, from twenty square feet to fifty square feet in area. The dark, narrow, dusty stairway, marked with spit of all kinds and graffiti, is always crowded with men. There are at least two floors exclusively dedicated to pornographic videos imported illegally from around the world. The shops sell but also make, mix, edit, and copy the local dance videos, mujra, and other sex scandals on CDs. But the major work of editing, mixing, and product

making is done in the other close-by plaza, Dar-ul-Rehmat, which has added storage spaces in the basement.

Before analyzing the piracy networks of Hall Road, I first illustrate the cultural significance of Lahore. Being the second biggest city of Pakistan and the capital of Punjab province, it is considered by many as the cultural capital of the country (Aziz, 2008). Lahore lost most of its diversity due to the migration of Hindus and other ethnic groups from Lahore to India after 1947, but it has retained its cultural and educational focus despite its provincial outlook. While there are a few studies on the colonial architecture in Lahore, not much work has been done regarding social and historical narratives of the area apart from brief mentions of Hall Road (Ahmed, 2000; Latif, 1994; Baqir, 1984). The descriptive nature of this literature provides us with a sense of development and expansion through different periods of the pre-colonial and colonial period. Focusing primarily on the monuments of Lahore, these are mostly a poetic description of the life and space of Lahore (Kipling, 1860). The emphasis of these historic accounts during and after the colonial period is on the architecture of the buildings constructed by the British. The Mall Road is a significant point in all accounts but only in relationship to the buildings surrounding the road. Hall Road has not attracted attention for an ethnographic scholarly study, which is understandable in the presence of more aesthetically important and interesting architecture in Lahore that has been the focus of many scholars. Goulding provides an account of the life and architecture of Lahore during the British period while he was a resident there in 1924 (1924). The infiltration of western influence in the life and culture are best described in his acclaimed historical and descriptive work. F. S. Aijazuddin's *Album of Lahore* provides maps and descriptions of Lahore and how it was built (2008). The collection of photographs and the maps during British colonization are part of the family collections produced in this collectable visual album on Lahore. The aerial view of Mall Road in 1920 shows the area around Mall Road where Queen Victoria's statue was placed and the Punjab assembly which was yet to be constructed. The book offers information on the historical view of the contracts for the construction of Mall Road. The recent publication about the study of maps of Lahore by Abdul

Rehman (2013), traces historical geography of the city from earliest maps to the most recent. This study also ignores Hall Road and passes through the Mall Road without mentioning any reference to the construction of halls, its significance, or its design in the location of colonial Lahore.

To reiterate my point, the above-mentioned accounts are important to signal the location of Hall Road, but they do not provide an analysis of the transition and the development of Hall Road from those community halls to present day electronic hub. Nevertheless, in the absence of a study specifically about the development of Hall Road, the accounts' descriptions signal the lifestyle and the importance of Mall Road as the central cultural site before the partition of India. The fact that Mall Road was a thriving cultural area, surrounded by cinema theatres showing American and British films and restaurants offering dance floors, provides us with a conceptual understanding of the processes and reasons why Hall Road has transformed into a digital and electronic hub in present times. The most modern and advanced forms of cultural activities, which Lahore experienced before partition, were replaced by the contemporary forms of digital entertainment, electronic goods, and western porn videos. The Alfalah Cinema initiated stage shows with mujra performances, while KFC and other contemporary food places have replaced the English restaurants. As K. K. Aziz writes in his memoirs, 'pulsating intellectual activity was provided by Lahore that British had built between 1860 and 1935' (2008, 6). The Regal Cinema, which is still located opposite the intersection of Hall Road, harbored many cultural activities including a ballroom dancing school located on the upper story of the Regal Cinema. The presence of many clubs, cafes, and restaurants, for example *Lorangs*, the finest restaurant in town, and *Stiffles*, 'where the guests dined in dinner jackets, danced in the evening and lunched with their friends in as English an ambiance as could be conceived' (Ibid. 7), are evidence of the thriving modern cosmopolitan culture of the city. Another restaurant, called *Standard*, was located on the driveway leading to the Regal Cinema, which catered to the 'middle class and was always crowded'. Aziz continues to describe the cultural life thriving on Mall Road by saying, 'at the other end of this "West End" of

Lahore was a cluster of humble eating-places where the modest and poor intellectuals got together and stayed together for long hours, sipping coffee or tea...settling the problems of the world' (Ibid. 8).

The anthropological study *Lahore: Topophilia of Space and Place* by Anna Suvorova offers an account of the cultural and social aspects of the city, but where she mentions more significant areas of Lahore, the business and market places of Mall Road are ignored altogether. The book *Mazaar Bazaar: Design and Visual Culture in Pakistan*, edited by Samia Zaidi is very helpful in looking at the reading of popular intervention and design in contemporary Pakistan where one finds useful analysis of popular imagery and its construction. The focuses of these studies ask different questions regarding the meanings, interpretations, and practices of popular material culture in present-day Pakistani society. These articles provide an overall understanding of the cityscape and how its culture is manifested, whereas this dissertation explores specific questions in the field of contemporary cultural and popular practices of mujra dance videos and new media technologies in Lahore. To explore this question, I use the above-mentioned literature to conceptually understand the cultural formation of the city, while Ravi Sundarams' study is used in the following section to examine the piracy networks that shape the electronic markets.

### ***Networks of Piracy: Hall Road***

After establishing cultural significance of Mall Road in Lahore, I present Hall Road for an examination of piracy networks that has transformed the cultural hub of Mall Road into a bustling electronic place. To analyze the networks of production, distribution, and use of mujra dance videos at Hall Road, I used Ravi Sundaram's theoretical framework to establish how this market, as a melting pot of piracy practices, has generated media objects of sexual desire. Sundaram situates his piracy analysis within Delhi's major electronic market, Palika, and evaluates critically its organic growth that has brought structural formations in the urban landscape of the city. Often recognized as 'India's first air conditioned underground market, the pride of the New Delhi's Municipal Corporation, designed with intention to give a big

boost to tourism', but instead, the market transformed into a place of 'great notoriety' that 'came with video boom' (2010, 97). According to Sundaram, 'with the cable boom of the 1990s Palika became the nerve center of the complex web of operations linking local cable networks, neighborhood video rentals, and an elaborate courier system between shops and pirate factories in neighboring states, Pakistan and South East Asia' (Ibid.). The period starting from the late 1980s to the 1990s is recognized in Pakistan and India (Larkin, Sundaram), like everywhere else in the world, as a time of booming video culture which transcended geographical boundaries which were otherwise very strictly controlled, like the political boundaries between India-Pakistan.

Sundaram elaborates the framework behind designing the Palika market as an initiative of Nehru's government's progressive propagandist ideology; to create an exclusive electronic market marking India's economic growth. Ironically, that ideology was subsumed over time by mushrooming piracy networks and their organic growth around the infrastructure of the electronic market. What happened to the nationalist ideology in India due to the media infiltration, piracy culture, and technological modernity in the Third World is quite similar to Pakistan where the religious nationalist ideology circumscribed by religion and morality was diffused and defied by the smuggling of pirated videos into the country through India, South East Asia, the UAE, and Europe. Nehruvian ideology in the face of piracy networks, and the religious ideology imposed by the military dictator Zia-ul Haq in Pakistan, met the same fate through influx of piracy and the flood of pornographic material in the markets during the decade of eighties. It happened at both places due to the emergence of VHS technology leading to VCDs, DVDs and Internet. Ideological phases in the two countries, progressive and religious respectively, faced the massive invasion of digital technologies due to illegal smuggling of video cassettes of Bollywood films and Pakistani Tele-dramas across borders that were otherwise heavily guarded and strictly controlled due to volatile conflict between the two countries. The use of Sundaram's study in this chapter, other than providing a comparative analysis of the piracy networks in two cities during the boom of digital technology, also helps in

examining closely how it has facilitated the generation of vast genres of mujra and pornographic materials in Pakistan.

Technology in the Third World, Sundaram suggests, often bypasses legal restrictions and structures. It is a fertile ground for germinating all kinds of piracy including fake branded TVs, software, and videos that overwhelm the markets. The very notion that piracy is beyond any legal boundaries attracts poor consumers as well as dealers of pirated brands, software, videos, and other reproductions of mass-produced goods. These then spread into the formal lawful structures of the city, not only by means of utilizing electricity, roads, networks, and factories but also by 'disrupting existing technologies of control and expansion' (Sundaram, 12). During Zia-ul-Haq's rule, the very center of ideology formation ignored reports in the print media regarding spread of video shops and associated vulgar morality<sup>35</sup>. That military rule is usually recognized by political historians of Pakistan Studies as the darkest and oppressive, harboring extreme religious views, rules, and regulations. I further demonstrate in this chapter through my reading of the news paper reporting that while being the most oppressive state, the government, nonetheless, shows signs of hypocrisies that marks its imagined weekend position and legitimacy among the public by ignoring the silence emergence of VHS video centers, music on TV and infrequent videos with Pakistani pornographic content. I add to Sundaram's position that attribute the widespread use of pirate modernity in India to the weakened bourgeois institutions and politically mobilized poor, by stating that piracy networks worked very well in Pakistan also because of hypocrisies and dichotomies prevalent within the techniques of governmentality. Each reproduction of illegal economic practices, media objects, and software creates a different form. This offers an insight into assessing the notion of piracy as something more than a parasitic act on the infrastructure of the cityscape (Ibid.). In Hall Road, piracy networks as well as porn and mujra dance video making centers not only build upon the existing city infrastructures, but also manifest people's

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<sup>35</sup> The report in the news paper that showed concerns over widespread mushrooming video center culture affecting the morals of the young, are examined in detail in the chapter arguing for circuits of desire.



agency to position their practices of making media objects as their object of sexual desire. This explains the case of the emergence of many buildings around Hall Road in Lahore, namely Dar-ul-Rehmat Plaza and others, along with many small shops in the alleys with businesses of pirated and illegal digital technologies including custom-built TV sets, music systems, editor/mixer, producer, distributor, other technicians, net café operator, computer operator, mobile repairer and seller and the downloading and copying of various multimedia on phones at a very cheap cost. These self-trained indigenous technicians, in return, find solutions in the way electronics get indigenized and reproduced with creative and intelligent means. Sundaram referred to piracy as creative 'corruption' - originally coined by Brian Larkin - a key interface between the urban infrastructure and media technologies, as mentioned above, which creates its own spatiality. Sundaram states that in the case of Delhi under the political goals of Nehru to reconstruct the city as modern and developed, piracy also affected his mega plans due to its mushrooming labyrinth like market formations, equally suitable for thieves and consumers. Similarly, we experience the same phenomenon with the alleys and labyrinth like road networks within Hall Road area, most suitable for establishment of piracy centers of illicit sexual desire. The infrastructure and informal sector is argued in more detail in the chapter of distribution centers of mujra dance videos, where I analyze it closely with the networks of piracy studied by Brian Larkin (2008).

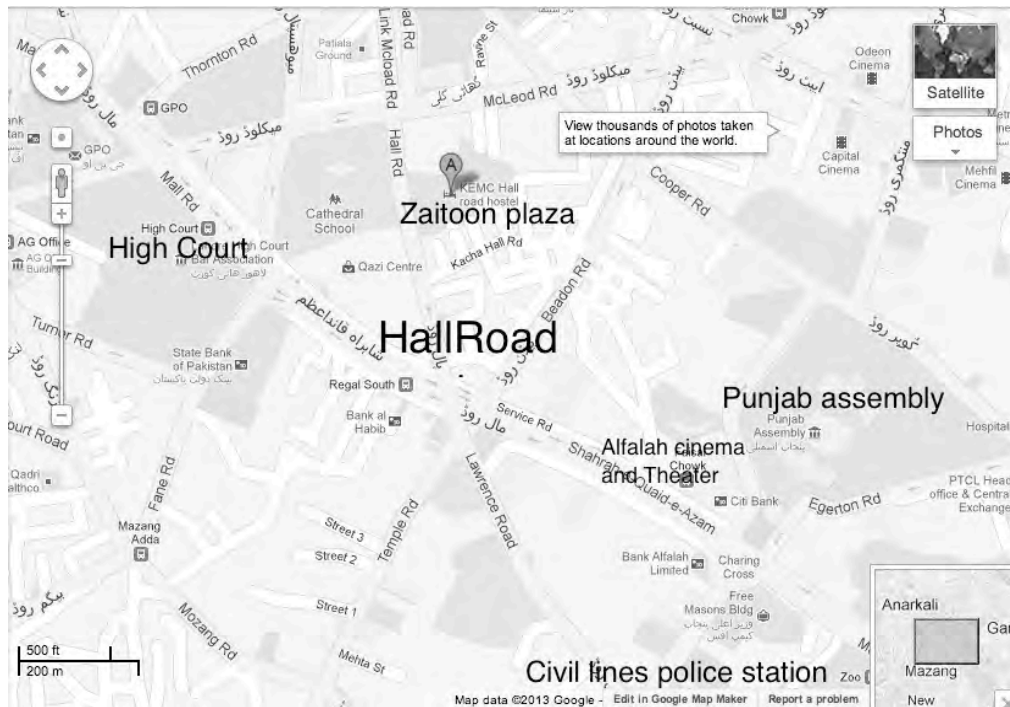


Fig. 1.2 A Google map of Lahore, showing clockwise the High Court, Zaitoon Plaza Hall Road, the Punjab assembly, the Alfalah theatre and the Civil Lines Police Station.



Fig. 1.3 The Alfalah Building with a stage theatre next to the Punjab Assembly

By mapping the one and half kilometer on Mall Road, one can truly understand the complex network in which piracy, sexual desire and state ideology operate. The above image Fig. 1.2 shows an aerial map of Mall Road

with Lahore High Court on the left top, which has banned mujra dance on several occasions, only adding to the dynamic relationship of these institutions with discursive sexual practices. In the middle of the map is Zaitoon Plaza in Hall Road. The right side is marked with the Punjab Assembly and the bottom right shows the Civil Lines Police Station. Next to the Punjab Assembly is the Alfalah building, which hosts the Alfalah Theatre. Once a cinema hall known for showing English films, it now hosts stage shows with mujra dance performances (Fig. 1.3). The court's orders passed in 2009 and earlier to ban this practice were 'silently' disobeyed only after a few weeks. The not-so-dominant discussion in the media sometimes succeeded in putting pressure on legislative bodies to bring it up in the assembly where the matter is often dismissed after issuing a resolution. By closely examining the Google map image, one can observe that the urban geography of the city and structures of law enforcement, law making, and the mushrooming illegal business of pornography shops are all located within a close vicinity of a kilometer and a half, creating a closed circuit. This circuit, which includes law-enforcing structures in close proximity to pornography distribution sites, shows the ease with which state departments and bureaucrats operate side-by-side in the urbanity of modern everyday business in apparent contradiction to state ideology (Alavi, 2008).

State ideology turned to the Islamic right five years after the inception of Pakistan and established deep foundations in all sections of society during and after the military rule of General Zia-ul-Haq from 1977 - 1988 (Toor, 2011; Hayes, 1987). This was the time when the religious state ideology faced the global boom of VHS and, later on, digital culture. In India, on the other hand, the urban nationalist goals of Nehru as an embellishment of progress and modernity initiated during the post-colonial times did not deliver the ideal urban space as envisioned. The ideal progressive market, Palika, fell victim to the informal pirated growth of electronic goods, affecting its infrastructures.

The military regime of Zia-ul-Haq, after toppling the government of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and his subsequent murder,<sup>36</sup> resurrected itself in the moralist mode and became the guardian of a code of conduct based on their definition of sharia. Establishing religion as an important and necessary code was a strategy to correct the moral behaviors developed during the times of Bhutto (Alavi, 2008). Overtly religious, the military rule also failed to deliver to the nation their proclaimed sharia law and its way of governing the economy, education, health, law, etc. The chaos is marked by mutating the Pakistan Penal Code and the Constitution by unending ordinances that kept on changing the laws and regulations to conform to their ideals of sharia. To create the impression of total social transformation, the state was bent on creating ways through which public space is heavily marked with Islamic religious identity. One good example, which gained currency by using and exploiting religion as the state's ideology to regulate citizens' day-to-day conduct, is the construction of overtly religious monuments around major squares of the cities and the overwhelming presence of plaques with the ninety-nine names of Allah. These plaques are continually fixed on the rows of trees beside the main roads marking the urban environment with religiosity. To remove or to object to their presence, even now runs the risk of intense reactions (Hayes, 1987; Iqtidar, 2011). Everywhere one sees the construction of mosques (Khan, 2011), slogans, and advertisement on the walls for religious rallies and the naming of numerous squares after Allah and/or His attributes. These believers were trained by textbooks at a primary level in all public schools to propagate a certain form of Islamic identity as the only identity of Pakistanis. They did not recognize other sectarian groups and religious minorities. The emphasis on establishing a Muslim nationhood through state policy is imposed on the urban structure of the city. These narratives are a means of baptizing the city through their use as a propaganda tool in an active strategy of the state to foster public conformity. The state's silence in this regard, despite imposing Hudood Laws

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<sup>36</sup> Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto was the elected Prime Minister of Pakistan who was arrested on charges of murder by the Chief of Army Staff Zia-ul-Haq in 1977, and was consequently hanged by the military regime. It is true the process of Islamization and of making religion the state's ideology started in the 1950s, but it more firmly took hold during the Military rule of Zia-ul-Haq.

in the early 1980s showcases duplicity or hypocritical behavior by officials<sup>37</sup>. The insistence on moral values marked by daily Quranic verses presented before prime news time on Pakistan Television signaled the government's religious ideology. It vehemently took on board the issue of *chador* and *chaar divari* (veil and four walls) a popular slogan to keep women at home, which was heavily resisted by women activist groups at the time. This public religious identity is being defied by the power of desire, which blurs the cultural and technological space within the cityscape. This blurring has 'produced a vitalistic urban sensorium, dream worlds of consumption and spectacle, confusion of the natural and the artificial' (Sundaram, 12). On one level, this sensorium reminds us of the period during the Islamic Revolution in a neighbor country, Iran, which transformed completely the outer look of citizens by strictly imposing sharia law. Due to resistance by Pakistani people through their inherent diverse cultural practices, and inherent cunning callousness of the state, the imposition of sharia in Pakistan appeared to be full of dichotomies.

The political discourse developed about Zia's period rightly categorized the times as oppressive. This dissertation seeks to bring about complexities in that oppressive period and dichotomies that emerged in the practice of everyday rule and control by the state. An analysis of these political times help construct a background on which I position illicit male sexual desire through the lens of mujra dance practices. As I mentioned in the introduction of the thesis, during the 1980s – the peak of Islamized military rule- there were some VHS videos made that scandalized 'educated' females studying art in Punjab University.<sup>38</sup> The military dictatorship imposed severe Islamic Injunctions, the Hudood Laws,<sup>39</sup> over matters relating to illegal sex, alcohol

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<sup>37</sup> Hamid, Mohsin. "Confronting hypocrisy", Pakistan Defence, September 10, 2010. <http://www.defence.pk/forums/current-events-social-issues/72314-confronting-hypocrisy.html>

<sup>38</sup>Punjab University from the late 70's to the present has been a stronghold of Islamic Jamiat Taliba, a student wing of the religious party Jamaat – e – Islami.

<sup>39</sup> Blog. [http://www.pakistani.org/pakistan/legislation/zia\\_po\\_1979/ord7\\_1979.html](http://www.pakistani.org/pakistan/legislation/zia_po_1979/ord7_1979.html)

consumption and blasphemy. The earliest recorded production and circulation of these VHS videos were made without the consent of these females, but they nevertheless gained currency and attracted popularity. Ironically, even though they were heavily scandalous videos, they were never stopped or controlled by any official authority. The term 'scandal video', literally meaning a publicized incident that brings disgrace to the sensibility of the society, is used by the users and distributors of this genre of video in Hall Road. I use this term following the users themselves because it marks the user's sensibility. The voyeurism in these videos cherish the fact that the person in the video, especially the woman, was unaware of the presence of the camera recording her intimate gestures, body parts or sexual intercourse. The camera then becomes the eye of the viewer, whether sitting right there outside the cabin in an Internet café, or the remotely extended eye watching these videos/clips on the screens of their computers. People regarded these two or three videos as a fresh innovation because previously the only nude film clips and still shots circulating the market were of women from the film industry and red light area. Another twist entered the realm of homemade VHS videos with the advent of Panasonic/JVC VHS cameras, which gave people the power to open small filmmakers' shops for the recording of weddings. Therefore, the more respectable the background of the woman, the higher the excitement created by the video.

An article<sup>40</sup> written by Sohaib Marghoob that appeared in the popular Urdu newspaper *Daily Jang* during the late 1980s reported on the popularity of a new video *sharif zaadiyon ka mujra*<sup>41</sup>. The video contained clips of different dances performed by females during private wedding parties and

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<sup>40</sup> I have tried to look through the archives of the reference section of the newspaper daily Jang, but could not find the articles, as they started to archive their materials only in the 1980's and this subject was not archived at the time. However, I met with the author of the article who is also in charge of the reference section and we discussed his article and other reports on the motives of men seeking prostitutes.

<sup>41</sup> Literally means a dance by noble women. I was told by Khalid Jutt, a shopkeeper at Zaitoon Plaza, that at that times the images of an insider view to females eating and dancing in private weddings was considered exciting.

were edited together to form a continuous video. The term *mujra* was used here to refer to the old tradition of *mujra* dance with a nostalgic value referring to the tradition of the courtesans' dancing and their sophisticated mannerisms during the time of the Mughals. However, the extra flavour was added by using the term *sharif zadiyon* meaning noble women, hence the origin of the sex scandal video genre. This is the same period when the non-party elected government supported by the military regime presented its budget for 1984-85<sup>42</sup>. One of the few items that had import tax duty removed was VHS video recorders, resulting in the sprawling of huge markets of video piracy and its production in the shops of Hall Road and the surrounding buildings. The impacts of the softness of the state towards mushrooming video centers was deeply felt by end of the decade of Eighties, close to the unexpected end of Zia-ul-Haq's period, as evident through media reports which mentioned the ill effects of video centers all over the country, in all kinds of localities from low economic backgrounds to 'elite' localities.<sup>43</sup>

Despite frequent reporting by the moralist journalist of mainly Urdu newspapers on videos' ill effects, the state kept its silence about sexual practices related with video phenomenon. It considered them banal because they were not seen as a threat and needed to control women's sexuality, but instead were seen as a man's 'privilege' and therefore dismissed for a strict action. I would here take the discussion of dichotomies and hypocrisies further by seeing it as a modes and techniques of governance. The way legal authorities control and dictate the private lives of people using religious codes and piety as a mode of conduct, where one continues to find discourse on sexuality and its 'illicit' practices in present day Pakistani society, offers a parallel to the 'Victorian Age' Foucault analyzed to present his argument. The other notion is close to Foucault's notion of power and sexuality, which can be used here to understand the state's failure to control the videos in order to maintain silence. According to Foucault's reading in *History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, he describes the abundance of sexual discourse emerging in the Victorian era

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<sup>42</sup> Daily Jang, June 16, 1984. Main headline on budget.

<sup>43</sup> Haq, Nazir. *Kia moashery ke sudhar ki koi soorat baqi nahi*, Daily Mashriq. April 18, 1988.

as the state needed to manage the sexual life of its citizens. Therefore the state devised ways and means through which everyday life was regulated, monitored, and recorded, hence the term 'Repressive Hypothesis'. For him, the oppressive period gives us the impression of controlling and oppressing peoples' sexuality, however, in actuality, we encounter abundance of sexual discourse obsessed with talk of sex. Sex was not something one simply judged; it was a thing one administered (Foucault, 1990). In the presence of cases filed against people for adultery, drinking, and the media control over sexually explicit content or any content which leads towards sexual imagination, it is simplistic to say that the government was 'only' biased towards women's sexuality. With my understanding of the research material, I argue that the emergence of VHS might have been understood as a medium, which was new, and its potential threat to morality was not fully understood. This repression and control of sexuality discourse is obviously connected to the proliferation of more exciting and enticing entertainments. People continue to practice their illicit sexual desires through manipulative means or sometimes actually believe that they are good Muslims while using these materials. Also, the religious values are productive if examined through the repressive hypothesis, because those values help sprout the volcanic explosive sexual desires that find an outlet through the production and consumption of these visual narratives of sexual fantasies.

The period, as stated earlier, also signifies the presence of official and public discourse which, rather than adopting the policy of regularizing any particular use, opts for curbing the open discussion and circulation of any ideas regarding sexual behaviors and practices. The silence, dismissal, and sometimes absurd, shortsighted, and instant actions such as banning dancers continued as normal course of action by subsequent governments. However, underneath these controlling agencies resides a discourse of sexuality bursting with volcanic energy, which has not been recognized in any public or official account. The state of denial, silent leniency, and occasional reaction towards these sexually illicit activities helped develop a culture, which may be interpreted as 'inherent culture', as articulated by David Runciman. For



Runciman, hypocrisy in politics explains how some of the political acts and decisions need to be 'polite' or diplomatic. However, he is very clear in establishing how other political moves by politicians may strongly affect society and hence cannot be grouped together in benign and necessary kinds of hypocrisy (2008). Whether hypocrisy had some major consequences in molding and crafting the cultural tradition, or was used to gain short-term political gains in the face of a massive influx of technology, it nonetheless reveals the politics of the ambivalent orthodox Islamic ideologue Zia-ul-Haq. In this section, I mapped the urban geography of Lahore as a site of piracy networks and argued for its subversive nature by explicit and forceful production and presence of sexually illicit material in the face of overwhelming rigid state religiosity. By using theoretical frameworks of Sundaram and Wadeen, I presented the notion of piety and hypocritical behaviors as inherent cultures, against the backdrop of power and 'repressive hypothesis' of Foucault. I argued that hypocrisy is a technique of governance, and a successful powerful tool adopted by the citizen to maneuver orthodoxy and oppressive regimental control of the state. In the following section, I analyze various maneuvering tools of subversion and negotiations with religious indoctrinated religious ideology, state's authority and female sexual desire.

## ***Section 2***

### ***Dichotomies, Double Standards, Hypocrisies or Negotiations***

This section examines the dichotomies as a maneuvering tool by people, present within the sexuality discourse generated by mujra dance video practices around the urban geographical space of Hall Road and the state institutions situated in close proximity of the Mall Road. Some of the dominant dichotomies on the practice of mujra dance videos and masculine desire emerged within the relational dynamism of media and state, media and religion, religion and desire, women and religion, morality and desire, repentance and desire, and women and morality. I examine the negotiations between the trade union of the shops selling mujra and pornographic material

and the police, to safeguard smooth and uninterrupted sale of sexually explicit material to protect their shopkeepers from raids while selling. I present both the trade union and the police as the stakeholders in these negotiations. I showcase by critically analyzing the police and shopkeepers' statements, that these negotiations on the one hand, are successfully used to deal with state's authority by getting rid of police raids, and then by sponsoring heavily religious parties and groups and meetings at religious festivals, carrying on the 'piety' tool to part of and acceptable within the larger group of society. The research evaluates the role of police, state control and regulations, which accept and simultaneously celebrate male desire through its leniency. I articulate that the complexity within these negotiations arises when confronted with any public display of female desire.

Several forms of negotiation are how people use their agency as strategic techniques and to counter dilemmas arising from religious and identity and political control, particularly the issues of morality and desire. In this dissertation, my articulation of the use of term negotiations for accomplishment of sexual desire does not embark to suggest these behaviors as conscious or unconscious, but instead, I choose to focus more on the discussion with interlocutors and their perception of these negotiations. In my analysis, I present their discussion on the notion of dichotomy to understand the discursive practices of mujra dance videos and sexuality. It is not the objective of the research to maintain judgments about a particular kind of ideological position or practice. Runciman spoke of dichotomies in a controlling social environment by saying, 'hypocrisy becomes the price we have to pay for going through with the performances of publically acceptable behavior' (2008, 52). In this section, the discussions on different aspects of dichotomies, the moral choices and public lying and concealment, are viewed as legitimate and necessary parts of everyday politics (Bok, 1989; Bok, 1999; Runciman, 2008). Reading through these dichotomies, one is able to explore the complex relationship between desire and piety and between virtues and vice. Runciman elaborates that persuading people to fake virtue is relatively easy, because it is consistent with their own selfish interests (2008, 50). The

insistence on virtue and piety, also seen on the use of cassette sermon in the public sphere in Charles Hirschkind's study of contemporary Muslim piety hood in Egypt, is prevalent as an integral component of public sphere in Pakistan, despite the fact that people are engaged at the same time in explicit illicit sexual practices. Upon observing critically the similar kinds of responses and attitudes among the shopkeepers and producers of the mujra dance videos who simultaneously claim to be supporters/propagators of religious values, the wider social and cultural context of these negotiations become apparent. Where Hirschkind claims a sense of piety in the public sphere by the use of audio cassettes, this dissertation takes his scholarly argument further by claiming that new media is offering a space, which enables men to express their desire whilst simultaneously feeling moral and pious. The notion of Muslimness is established by the creative use of dichotomies, sometimes in the shape of religious posters in the shops along with complete enjoyment of sexually explicit practices of mujra dance videos on their computer screen at the editing tables or selling counters of their shops. The fluidity of the new media technology has the capacity to cross-rigid structures and boundaries and is reminiscent of the fluidity prevalent in society, in terms of its capacity to cross the rigid ideologies imposed externally by the social structures or internalized as part of a living culture. For better clarity, I am presenting these dichotomies and negotiations in three groups: male desire and religious ideology; male desire and female desire; and male desire and the state. These groups have several subgroups in which I articulate in detail the techniques of negotiations and agency of people, along with the dichotomies present in the overall cultural fabric.

### ***Male desire and the religious ideology***

This group of dichotomies consists of three components, which articulate techniques of negotiations of dealing with overt religious ideology of Pakistan for the fulfillment of illicit sexual desires. In the first part, I examine the reality of the threat by the religious extremists groups to the practitioners of mujra dance videos, and how these practitioners attempt to safeguard their businesses from the attacks of the extreme religious and

militant groups by establishing their religious values and morality in the public sphere. The second part demonstrates the dichotomous behaviors of consumers as well as shopkeepers by examining the open presence of potentially blasphemous visual elements in the display of the mujra and porn videos in the shops, which fail to threaten populace religious sentiments. Thirdly, repentance and reward as a promised paradise is examined as a significant agency of people to negotiate with religious values and the notion of Muslimness. These negotiations with their religious values gets further complicated when confronted with female sexual desire and performers of mujra dances, who are judged against popular moralist values.

***The charged Muslim self, threats, and no attack on Hall Road.***



Fig. 1.4

The above image shows a fire that was set to porn and mujra dance CDs/DVDs by the video shopkeepers at Hall Road in 2009. The image presented above is a cutout from the Urdu daily *Pakistan*. The title of the picture is ‘Fear, regret or pressure?’ and the statement underneath considers it an act done under pressure, but finally appreciates it as a sign of repentance. This fire was set on the crossing of Mall Road from where the Hall Road starts. The shopkeepers are visible surrounding the big bonfire just after throwing CDs and DVDs with pornographic content. This performance reminds an act of initiation in which all sins will be burnt to ashes and the baptized soul will emerge as pious and cleansed of all evil deeds. The whole performance was a response to a bomb threat by religious extremist militant groups and/or Taliban to shopkeepers of Hall Road for selling sexually explicit materials. In

the media reporting, the traders at Hall Road stated that they were threatened by unknown people about these pornographic CDs<sup>44</sup>.

It is no coincidence that there has never been any attack by the Taliban or any extremist groups on Hall Road, before or after the bonfire performance, although numerous warnings and some instances of violence in Peshawar against music CD shops, and a burning of a cinema in Karachi have been recorded. The year 2009 witnessed most brutal attacks by suicide bombers in the city, which transformed Lahore's landscape because of heavy security check-posts, barbed wires around important government and public buildings and declaration of holidays for more than a month in Lahore due to the fear of schools as the next target of Taliban. Since then many times successful suicide bomber attacks took many lives and devastated religious places like shrines, religious places and festivals of Shia and religious minorities, shopping centers, government institutions like Central Police Station, military headquarters and interrogation centers of Intelligent Services. Selected eminent citizens from religious minorities and Shia community have been target-killed in open public spaces during all times of the day. The attacks on the above are a part of larger strategic power struggle, which although profess certain kind of orthodox sharia rule, but, nonetheless, ignored these places of sexually explicit practices. The traders are known to financially support religious groups. The funds for these religious groups are collected from the markets on a regular basis through moneyboxes placed there (Hussain 2010, 139). The biggest *milaad* on special religious days<sup>45</sup> is sponsored by the union leaders on the street of Hall Road and public traffic is blocked by tents covering the gathering. All of these practices help support the trade union leaders who safeguard the businesses at Hall Road.

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<sup>44</sup>Masood, Salman. "In City of Tolerance, Shadow of the Taliban." Lahore Journal, The New York Times, November 2, 2008. Accessed: 10.06.2012, 5:15 pm  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/03/world/asia/03lahore.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/03/world/asia/03lahore.html?_r=1)

<sup>45</sup>A religious meeting where people recite verses and poetic expressions about the personality and love of the Prophet. This form has been developed organically through many centuries, followed by the Barelvi Sunni sect of Muslims usually and is normally considered a replacement of musical festivals.

This performance proves to be a very intelligent technique by the shopkeepers to spread the message on popular media of shared Muslim values and supremacy of religious code of life. Since then, Hall Road never became target by these religious extremist groups. The significance of this performance is also evident by the way print media - both English and Urdu, for international and liberals and local and populace respectively - analyzed their act. The Urdu newspaper appreciated the action, correctly understanding the hidden message of the shopkeepers. However, English newspapers and the international media reported about the dichotomous attitudes of the government about sexual practices and their open consumption by taking strong actions against them, but are in the face of growing 'Talibanization'. Tariq Ali pointed out on this issue that the State silently observed the few times when members of the Taliban or religious extremists from *Lal Masjid* burnt CDs containing 'explicit contents' in the last few years. It has not so far stated its policy clearly and/or supported or reproached any group, the religious or the political, nor the shopkeepers<sup>46</sup>. The Washington Post reports a woman parliamentarian; Yasmeen Rehman 'was surprised at how eager the traders were to comply with anonymous threats'.<sup>47</sup> For the sitting parliamentarian Rehman, a critique of this performance was to question the weakness of the shopkeepers who rather than resisting the posed threat, had instead complied with Taliban's commands. Her comment also suggests that state's rules and authority do not have problems with the presence of such sexually explicit materials circulating the open market. The government appears to be weak, in the analysis of the international media, to confront the rise of religious extremism and militancy, and is a silent observer leaving people to negotiate their own practices.

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<sup>46</sup> Ali, Tariq. "Pakistan at Sixty". London review of Books, Vol. 29 No. 19, 4 October 2007  
pages 12-15  
[http://www.lrb.co.uk/v29/n19/ali\\_01\\_.html](http://www.lrb.co.uk/v29/n19/ali_01_.html)

<sup>47</sup> Washington Times. "Taliban Infiltrates culture of Pakistani liveliest. Accessed: 07.07.12, 10:43 am  
<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/apr/23/taliban-infiltrates-culture-of-pakistans-liveliest/print/>

The self-righteousness of the shopkeepers was seen as submission, as stated by lawyer and activist Rafay Alam, on his weekly popular radio program and in an article as, 'whether the Hall Road Trade Association, in carrying out such self-policing, was "giving the local Taliban their first victory"'.<sup>48</sup> According to the report, the shopkeepers admitted that they deserve punishment because they sell pornography. This view was confirmed when I was interviewing shopkeepers at Hall Road and discussed this particular event. Kashif is a young video shop owner at the start of the Hall Road, and was influenced by a very mature and religiously inclined person who owns a shop on Hall Road. In a long series of interviews, he discussed a lot about mechanisms of networks at Hall Road, production, consumption's pattern, his own perceptions and ideas about pornographic market and some of his personal life anecdotes. His response was typical like rest of the interviewees responses, that is, to establish initially, their religious and moral views and how much they condemn these mujra dance videos practices which are against the spirit of piety and Muslimness. He himself does not like sexually explicit material, but he sells it only for the sake of business. His response to the notion of 'submission' and 'weakness' in the face of Taliban's threat was that their business already falls into the category of illegal and illicit work, which naturally should be a point of contention in an Islamic society. He added, however, that burning the CDs voluntarily should send the message that those vendors should not be targeted<sup>49</sup>. Initially, in the interviews all the shopkeepers kept the stance that they didn't like this work, and that they believe in Muslim piety and values. After becoming more comfortable with me, they would comment more in detail about the processes of their businesses. By

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<sup>48</sup> The Washington Times, "Taliban, terrorism stifle life in Lahore." April 23, 2009. Accessed: 07.07.2012, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/apr/23/taliban-infiltrates-culture-of-pakistans-liveliest/print/>  
The article was published in The News which is not retrievable, as says the message. The comments of the article in another newspaper can be seen here at, Indian Express News. "Lahore Cultural capital to Taliban territory." Accessed: 07:07:12 at 11:02am <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/lahore-cultural-capital-to-taliban-territory/378300/2>

<sup>49</sup> Kashif. In an interview at his shop in Hall Road, Lahore, 2010.

using the same technique of piety and Muslimness, they tried to ward off Taliban's threat and as an inherent part of daily life and continued to project themselves with these values to me, a female researcher who is recording their interviews. The sense of piety is a shield used to protect from accusation and/or attack, whether verbal by a media person or by religious group and legitimize their mujra dance practices/businesses by distancing their 'true' intention from the 'forced' work choice.

But the techniques of negotiations don't stop here. Kashif stated further that they also get, 'support, and backing from the Union and the officials'.<sup>50</sup> It is the support of the trade union, which is provided by investing heavily in the fundraising for the religious meetings and *milaads*, as articulated earlier. Other shopkeepers from Hall Road, Khalid Jutt and Sher Mohammad also affirmed this view and further explained that they were careful about displaying the CDs on their counters and shelves and sold these videos to their regular customers only. For them, it was a matter of another two weeks since the burning CD performance, and then they would return to a normal business routine. Kashif's comment about the support from the union is also significant as it reveals assumptions about protection from extreme militant attacks if the trade union leaders and police support the shopkeepers. These successful negotiating maneuvers are combined with a belief that all the other suicide bomber killings were done by other people, like American agents, who are not Muslim. For them, 'a Muslim cannot kill a Muslim', was a valid rationale. These statements of denial in the face of official statements of Taliban who takes responsibility of all these killings and attacks, shows on one level the dichotomies present within the culture and also show people's soft corners for these religious extremist groups, simply because they use the name of Islam. To question anyone who claims piety is unacceptable. Whether they are indulged in sexually explicit practices or killing people, as long as they claim piety and Muslimness, people will continue to not only accept but also financially support them.

### ***Blasphemy and no Blasphemy.***

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<sup>50</sup> Kashif. In an interview at his shop in Hall Road, Lahore, 2010.



In this segment I present the visuality of Zaitoon plaza and other plazas in Hall Road, which keep pornographic material in lustrous DVD covers showing naked and semi naked female in seductive poses on open shelves and counters of their shops. I argue by analyzing the visuality of these sexually charged environments and materials placed next to religious posters that are apparently dichotomous in nature, these visual placements are in actuality very strategic techniques of shopkeepers to establish their 'inner' soul as pious and connected with popular ideology of Muslimness in the society. I remember visiting Zaitoon Plaza at Hall Road for the first time. The interior of the shops radiated both with sexual energy, caused by the open display of porn and mujra dance CDs, and the simultaneous overt religiosity of the shopkeeper expressed through the decoration of the walls with religious posters and calendars with verses from Quran. The decoration of the interiors of the shops in Zaitoon Plaza that sell, mix and compose porn and other CDs, seeking blessings from Allah, are apparently contradictory in nature. The inscribed verses of Quran on the walls are diametrically opposite to sexually explicit material, which is un-Islamic and immoral. Ironically, the computer monitors that are used to mix, edit, and circulate these videos are placed directly under Quranic texts. These religious posters warrant the blessings and prosperity in the flourishing of business, a common practice seen in most of the shops in Lahore. The way that Allah and Eros mingle together is only possible in the subversive element of porn videos in Pakistan (Ali, 2002, 60).



Fig. 1.5 Shops at Hall Road displaying CDs of mujra Dance next to an Islamic calendar with Mecca and Holy Shrine of the Prophet.

I argue that the shops, that are full of decorative verses from the Quran, subvert the official religious ideology, baptizing the presence of the informal pornographic sector in the contemporary urban-scape of Pakistan<sup>51</sup>. The blessings of Allah that these verses request are not only for general well being, but also for the flourishing of business. The business is then baptized by including Divine blessings. The familiarity of religious values and codes displayed on the walls is comforting for customers, who are also accommodating contradictory feelings within – guilt and strong sexual desire. Why such images do not get the attention of religious extremists can be attributed to multiple reasons. Firstly, a low visual understanding of such groups does not recognize any blasphemous intention in such placements and accepts it as a normal decoration. Secondly, the traders are known to give huge donations to religious groups and carry sympathies for religious parties and jihadi groups. Therefore, they are often overlooked for any dishonesty and corruption in their businesses, including unhealthy food supplies, medicines, and more. This parallels Lisa Wadeen's study of Syria, where a portrait of Hafiz-ul-Asad is prominently displayed in shops, something that is not required by the officials, but is used to keep away the wrath of the police because of their involvement in illegal businesses (1998, 503-523). Hence, the shopkeepers consider these explicit images as natural consumerable items for male sexuality. Thirdly, I would argue that the religious groups and parties have their own political agenda and these sexually explicit materials and such displays in Hall Road are not considered significant enough for political gains. In contrast, in the case of Salman Taseer, it was the liberal elements within Pakistani society that were targeted by the religious parties, and in the case of Facebook and YouTube it was western imperialism that was condemned.

Pakistani society is believed to be sensitive towards its religious sentiments. Any attempt of disrespect targeting Prophet Mohammad is met

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<sup>51</sup> Predominantly an urban phenomenon, there are small shops present in smaller cities that also sell mujra dance videos.

with intense public reaction. This sensitivity is evident in numerous accounts over the last few years: mobs protesting in the streets against a video on YouTube and cartoons in a Danish newspaper; the banning of Facebook; murder of the governor of Punjab, Salman Taseer in the name of blasphemy in 2011, burning and looting of Christian communities by enraged Muslim mobs and most recently burning alive of a young couple in a brick kiln by people of three villages incited by hatred sermons of a mullah. In these circumstances, it is believed that Pakistani feels very strongly about the honor of Quran, Prophet Mohammed, and his companions. The women, according to popular beliefs and sharia, are considered 'impure' during menstruating period and thus are refrained from entering mosques and touching Quran. They are usually not allowed to enter the close proximity of Sufi Saints' graves just in case they are in menstruating state, and are considered lesser pious Muslim in the hierarchy of piety, as they are unable to perform prayers and fasts. These codes of purity and piety are part of popular discourse in Pakistan. Common women are framed within these codes of purity, and thus it is inconceivable how the pornographic images with naked female bodies resides next to Quranic verse posters and images of Mausoleum of Prophet Mohammad. One of the shop keepers, Khalid Jutt, responded to my inquiry (I could not ask this question while I was in the shop fearing I might incite religious sentiment) as, 'well, this is not nice to place these images and Quranic verses together, but, you know, Quran has its own respect and business has its own place. There is no confusion in our minds'.<sup>52</sup> It is evident that politics of convenience and making-do (de Certeau, 1988) in everyday life allows crossing of all boundaries for personal interests, while keeping the clarity in religious belief. Hardly offensive to men in Zaitoon plaza, it suggests a dynamic relationship of religious ideology with visual pleasure. To get offended by non-Muslims is a matter of belief where one needs to act to safeguard Islamic values and establish one's Muslimness, to accept and ignore conveniently the presence of nude females next to sacred texts is a matter of sexual pleasure inter-mingled with monitory benefits. In my argument, I have presented the technique of subverting oppressive religious ideology for the fulfillment of sexual desire by

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<sup>52</sup> Khalid Jutt. In an interview in KFC across Mall Road in 2010.

simply employing the notion of piety and Muslimness through decorating shops with religious posters. Similar techniques of subverting state authorities in Syria is examined by Wadeen, in which Asad's portraits in the shops present shopkeepers with loyalties that help in return keeping away the authorities from illegalities in their businesses.

Hirschkind defines public space as independent of the state, operating on self-discipline with the power of religion (2006, 34). However, the public space that is created in the presence of such cassettes in Pakistani society is comparatively subversive of the popular religious doctrine, because they are also being used side by side with mujra dance videos, which are sold by the same shopkeepers and are consumed by the general populace. Public spaces in a Muslim society in Egypt as discussed by Hirschkind are full of sermons for making the nation as pious as possible (2006). The public as an independent entity and as an institution, he recognizes, is a fundamental force in shaping the consciousness of contemporary Egyptian society. The same media is used in Pakistan to create a generation of young Muslims who are devout and conscious about moral conduct, duties, and the power of religion. This research claims to add to Hirschkind's findings that Muslims in Pakistan use the immense possibilities of new media and digital technologies to serve their sexual desires and pleasures, by employing piety as a technique of dichotomy and negotiations.

***Pleasure and paradise: overtly religious ideologies and illicit sexual practices.*** The last two segments examine the techniques of negotiations to subvert overtly orthodox religious ideology in order to fulfill illicit male sexual desires. In this section, I continue to present the notion of *tauba* (repentance) as the third technique of negotiating religious ideology with sexual desire. I assert here that males accommodate their religious beliefs through numerous explanations to justify their illicit sexual desires and practices. By accommodating male sexual desire with the larger religious and moralist frame, they are using their agency to deal with imposed structure by the society as well as the state. These negotiations are used to analyze, in this particular chapter, the construction of masculinity and male desire within

popular Pakistani cultural discourse. These negotiations are a study of masculinity and I argue by presenting my analysis of male desire and its complex negotiations with female desire, that the notion of *tauba* and repentance is not granted to females who are also seen as subject of sexual desire.

In one of the interview sessions in the public park of Lahore, I had a discussion with a group of young friends, led by Usman, who were fans of watching *mujra* dance and porn videos. Almost formulaic, the first statement came as, “The purpose of making these porn videos is to induce evil instincts”<sup>53</sup>. This statement reveals the popular understanding that indulgence in sexually explicit material is forbidden in Islam. They used the word, *Shaitaani*, meaning Evil, to the extent that to stress his meaning, he stated ‘Allah has forbidden watching a naked body, and that even if one is having sex with his wife he is always told to do so in the dark’. I wondered, then, why they continued to watch these videos if they believed these are ‘evil’ materials, and Usman responded to my query as:

To be honest, I heard it from people and never asked any religious scholar, fearing they will think I am a novice. We are told these sins will be punished in after life period, that’s why we fear Allah. But, we still do it. Because I think, when Allah will question such sins, we will repent and go to paradise later. But right now I want to indulge in watching porn.

It is a commonly held belief that all Muslims are destined to be in the promised paradise in life after death. This belief further explains that Allah has guaranteed Muslims entry into paradise, but Muslims will be punished for their sin committed on this earth first, and then after obtaining purification, will eventually be allowed to enter paradise<sup>54</sup>. They all chuckled at Usman’s comment who continued as, ‘we can wait to enter the paradise, so why not enjoy this world as well!’ The notion of *tauba* (repentance) works well along with a very strict notion of piety in the popular belief system. This is a typical example of the public discourse experienced in Lahore which uses the ‘authoritative symbolic language of Islam’ (Eikelman and Anderson, 1) to form a mixed kind of community delving between religious ideology and carnal

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<sup>53</sup> Usman. In an interview in Lahore Model Town Park, 2010.

<sup>54</sup> This common belief is reiterated constantly many small and big mosques by Imam who leads the prayers, in Juma’t Kutbah before Friday prayers, based on popular literature including: *Mot ka Manzar, marne ke baad kiya ho ga* ( a death scene: see what happens after death) These widely printed and distributed by several publishers circulates the market without any copyright issues.

pleasures. The ease, with which Usman and his friends explained how they place their practices to fulfill sexual desires within a dominant religious value system, shows their negotiating power. The techniques of negotiations are basically dealing with the sacred value system to reimburse after one passes through youth and enter old age. It is a safe deal as one is not denouncing religious values. Instead they reinforce it by articulating that their indulgence is sinful and thus, in future, after repentance, they will seek forgiveness of Allah.



Fig. 1.7 The first image shows a shelf in a shop in Zaitoon plaza which places famous mujra dancer Nargis' CDs under a DVD set of the Quran. The second image shows two shelves, one of which holds CDs with religious poetry and sermons made for the holy

month of Ramzan, when every Muslim prays and fasts for repentance. The third image shows mujra being edited while behind the computer is a framed text from Quran.

In the presence of strong Islamic values, which prohibit any sexual experiences or relationships outside the bond of marriage (Bouhdiba, 1985), these pornographic images signal a transgressive (Foucault, 1998) popular culture of sexuality and pleasure.<sup>55</sup> The sexual discourse articulated by Usman and his friends adds another dimension to what Charles Hirschkind describes as communal activities in public interaction that design the collective existence. His understanding is that the participants form a community by listening to the Islamic cassette sermons. This community, through the interaction of its participants' collective existence, formulates a space for communal reflexivity, which is 'understood as necessary for perfecting and sustaining the totality of practices upon which an Islamic society depends' (2006, 8). Hirschkind's study doesn't show any reference to other usage of media technology by the same generation that mediates between their social and religious identities, as is evident by looking at the image above. One cannot ignore the abundance of social websites originating from the Islamic world which address the same issues of collective piety as mentioned by Hirschkind, but they are simultaneously loaded with multi-layered facets primarily for the sexual gratification and desire. I maintain, by using the example posed above, that people continue to remain religious and at the same are able to negotiate with new media to explore their sexual desires. Any attempt to understand the use of new media without any reference to sexual representation, I argue, is a limited approach, and hence this dissertation seeks to fill the gaps in the scholarship that focuses on the notion of piety and use of new media technologies in the public sphere in the Muslim world. The heavy presence on the web of these materials next to religious content provides a holistic understanding of any Islamic society's use of modern technologies. Isolating

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<sup>55</sup> Foucault in the introduction to his *History of Sexuality* states that by not accepting the rules and orders of everyday power structures is upsetting the social order and law that prohibits him/her to express freely his/her sexual desire and pleasure. He even considers the mere fact of 'speaking about it (sex) has an appearance of a deliberate transgression.' (78, 6)

religion from daily social activities is a limiting experience, problematizing the much bigger question posed in these studies.

Another significant encounter with an event manager, D.J. Butt, during field research, explains the successful use of techniques of negotiations of popular religious values piety and Muslimness, and the business of pleasure. In my examination of Butt's negotiations with pleasure and religion, I critically analyzed his notion of *tauba*, how he establishes his agency, which goes a step further from Usman's techniques of negotiation. His apparently small shop in the corner of a local market known for food stalls in the Model Town, (a posh locality in Lahore) had some dancing lights flickering outside its old dingy exterior with a 'D. J. Butt' sign shining on the door. When I entered the shop with my friend, it appeared to be a dark café lounge with a smoky environment. My curiosity increased when the only person sitting in a room suggested sitting in another room with a better atmosphere. The person turned out to be the manager and the owner of the place and told us that he is the event manager for all kinds of parties ranging from academic seminars to dance parties. This café was his office and also a hangout for young people. Extremely friendly, he showed us on his laptop the pictures of the parties he has organized and talked about the new trends he is introducing in music, light, and décor, along with supplying alcohol in such parties. While describing his life struggle from a *chaiwala* (tea boy) to event manager, he mentioned the persona he has created for a successful DJ. This included an unshaven rugged face, wet long hair, a long black over-coat along with a company of female escorts at dance parties<sup>56</sup>.

After talking about his lifestyle with pride, he mentioned his religious beliefs with concern. Even though he had acquired money, fame, and a name through his 'evil' business, he still remembers his duties as a dutiful Muslim. Thus, out of guilt, he offers subsidies to events of a religious nature, including religious gatherings or politico-religious rallies and demonstrations. Furthermore, whenever he buys new equipment such as speakers, sound systems, and amplifiers, he makes sure that it is used in some religious event

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<sup>56</sup> Butt, D. J. In an interview in his café/office in model town in 2011.



initially so the first sound that comes out of it has a religious content. Using media for pleasure and business is overlapped by the desire to purify the 'evil' use of the media. He accommodates both pleasure and religion by sending his equipment to get 'purified' and 'baptized' in a religious function. It can later be used for worldly events like dance parties. He recognized the guilt of actively participating in forbidden practices, therefore, he likes to support religious rallies and events. He even said he planned to leave his work at some point (when he has earned enough) because it is not 'good'. These are the same negotiations which Birgit Meyer probes in her study, 'how new media relate to...fit in with, reinforce, challenge, affect, transform – established practices of mediation' (2010, 12). These mediations are in direct contrast to existing forces of religious mediation infiltrating popular understanding and abundance of possibilities of the same media by people who use it for personal pleasure while bonding with religious ideological groups. Butt's notion of repentance is a successful tool of negotiation as he is able to use his agency to operate within the oppressive religious moral value system. Furthermore, by using the same financial sponsorship, he is able to carry on entertaining clients demanding dance parties because he establishes himself as part of larger Muslim community despite his persona of 'cool guy'. His confidence that by purifying his music system he attains acceptability is not unfounded. He understands the culture, which operates on dichotomies and constant negotiations.

Saima Khan, Lahore's most popular stage and film's mujra dancer,<sup>57</sup> became instantly famous by exposing her breasts on live stage shows. She survived a gunshot fired at her in a rivalry, due to her constant demands on stage shows for mujra dances, by another dancer's group after she finished her performance<sup>58</sup>. Since her dance videos comprise a significant part of my

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<sup>57</sup> "Saima Khan". Wikipedia.org. accessed: 10.06.12, 5: 50 pm  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saima\\_Khan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saima_Khan),

<sup>58</sup>Daily Times, "Stage dancer Saima Khan attacked", June 21, 2007. Accessed: 10.06.12, 6:00 pm  
[http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2007\06\21\story\\_21-6-2007\\_pg13\\_5](http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2007\06\21\story_21-6-2007_pg13_5),

analysis, I decided to see her live performance. It was an afternoon during Ramadan<sup>59</sup>, two hours before the breaking of the fast. I was informed by my assistant that 'Saima is doing a "hot" dance shoot'. The dance was the last remaining sequence of the Punjabi film to be released on Eid day<sup>60</sup>. It was a typical dance scene shot in the rain, ideal for showing female body contours in a drenched translucent dress, which is also considered a popular sexual expression in the cinema of Indian subcontinent. Khan was taking lots of re-takes, which annoyed the director, who was cursing her in a hissed voice. At last, she managed to get one proper long dance shot, but she suddenly interrupted it by dramatically standing still. She lifted her right hand and called for the director to stop rolling the camera. I soon realized that the dance had stopped because of the *azaan*, which is the call to prayer. I wondered how she could hear the sound surrounded by blasting music. Then she asked someone to get her *duppata* (scarf). She wore her black *duppata* and remained still until the *azaan* had finished. During the whole *azaan* I could hear the director-cursing Khan for disrupting the shooting and wasting their precious time and money. They all were short of time as the time to break the fast was approaching. The look on Khan's face was of a person in charge of her life, fully empowered, who knew what she wanted and desired. That was the moment of complete control over one's negotiating power, so certain that she will not be challenged by all these males watching her semi nude dance. (Fig. 1.7)



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<sup>59</sup> Throughout Ramadan, the common practice in Pakistan is not to eat, drink in public places and avoid sexually enticing activities. As is the case in many Islamic countries, the time period starting from the last call to prayer of the day to the next day Morning Prayer is the time when people have license to indulge in non-religious, secular, pleasure-oriented activities, transforming the public space from utterly religious to modern (Walter, 2006, 215).

<sup>60</sup> A festive day at the end of Ramazan.



Figure 1.7: Saima Khan, famous stage and film dancer in the middle of a very sexy dance shooting asked the director to stop the shoot and wore her *duppata* to cover her head as she heard the sound of *azaan* (call for prayer).

When I approached her for an interview she was sitting among producers and other team members in a relaxed state. Oblivious to her drenched state, she replied to my query about her feelings at her sudden demand to stop the shoot as, 'it's a matter of confidence'. Her response was quite apt because she is quite capable of making hundreds of men desire her simultaneously on stage. Aware of her power she only exercised her belief system to pay respect to the *azaan*. Shooting during the holy month of Ramadan was a business matter, whereas stopping the shoot during the *azaan* was an act of defiance to all the male crew watching her dance. She exercised her agency but the experience of empowerment of the female over the male crew was only possible by invoking popular religious sentiments. Religion gave her an edge over men, which she would not be able to exercise in any other situation. The complexity in her negotiations arise through the fact that she was a female prostitute who is generally considered 'vulgar' and did not want to continue dancing for a short period out of respect to the call for prayer. I noticed, while standing behind, the young boys and other people watching her dance and commenting on her body parts, said, '*gashti nu Islam ho giya ai*' (the prostitute converts to Islam). The problem with accepting her negotiations strategies was she was not the one, indulging in pursuit of her sexual desires, but was the object of male sexual desire. Her repentance and show of religious beliefs in public sphere does not hold the same currency as was shown by the confidence of D. J. Butt. Nonetheless, religious beliefs

empowered her enough to stop the shoot and director could not scold her in public and the crew cursed her names in low tones, but her strategy to assert her dominance over these men remain unchallenged.

What makes this power play complicated is not how a 'vulgar' and 'fallen' woman, who earns her living by inciting male desires, could show her religious affinities, but the context of the dance shoot. First, the shooting of a lascivious dance was happening during Ramadan right before the breaking of the fast, so the hypocrisies were being played on each side. The dancer might be fully aware of her position of a 'fallen' woman, the crew who was fasting and recording this dance during Ramadan was enjoying drooling over her exposed skin and the suggestive transparency of her white silk dress. But who bears the brunt? That group did not doubt their moral values and felt as relaxed as the dancer to carry out these contradicting activities. But they commented on her display of religion. One of the media reporters watching the dance asked me about my background. Once he found out that I was doing research, he said, 'yeh to gandey logon ka kaam hai, aap is mein kiyon par gai hain?' (This is the work of vulgar people, why are you doing research on them?). The media reporter, who clearly enjoyed watching her dance in the rain, suddenly maintained his distance from the object of desire by labeling her as vulgar. So I asked in return what he was doing here if he thinks it's vulgar. When I asked this, he simply looked at me and then moved away. His approaching me was another strategy to assert his power by disassociating him from the scene and judging the dancer, whereas, in return I failed to carry on the same strategies of negotiations of one's sense of piety and could not continue the conversation. The option for D.J. Butt to repent and join religion after he has earned enough for his family is much more viable than Saima Khan practicing her religious beliefs because of her gender.

### ***Male desire and negotiations with female desire***

In this section, I primarily examine the dichotomies inherent within masculine sexual desire in relations with female sexual desire. I argue that in negotiations with female desire, masculinity experiences complexities while they negotiate their desire. The space in which females exercise their desire

determines negotiations of male desire; if the female is viewed as a public woman she is free to exercise her sexual desire as well as mock male sexuality in public space like popular theaters, and if the female desire is expressed in a domestic sphere, then she is burdened with the imposed values of piety and morality and thus is judged accordingly. Discussion of dichotomies prevalent in male desire marks important critical debate because the next two chapters examine the production of mujra dance videos and analyze the visual and lyrical content of these dances. This section offers a theoretical base to structure my main argument in the next two chapters.

Going up and down the narrow stairs between the several floors of dingy Zaitoon Plaza, I encountered the surprised gaze of male customers and shopkeepers who are not used to of seeing female customers of porn and mujra videos. Their gaze was juxtaposed against a display of hundreds of CD covers on the counter shelves revealing lascivious women in dazzling postures exposing all the body/part of their bodies. It was an exclusively male space and the interior of the plaza was a hall of fantasies. My male friend felt embarrassed in my presence and wanted to stay aloof at a distance so that he could maintain some self-respect. I felt like I was trespassing and my presence was intimidating to the public display of male desire. Whether it was intimidating for them or for me remains unclear but I was definitely the outsider, a fact obvious by the silence falling upon the entire floor.

When I asked the shopkeepers in Zaitoon plaza's third floor, dedicated to porn videos, about some particular CDs I was looking for my research, I was told quite blankly they were not available. I could only get hold of those videos, which were on display. Then my male research assistant asked me to go further away while he negotiated and after ten minutes he returned with all the required material. In this subsection, I examine how males view female desire and the dichotomies present in their perception of female desire and sexuality. The male viewing of female desire is subject to the binary of the domestic versus the public sphere, which desires to control it within the domestic realm while simultaneously desiring a sexually expressive female in a public sphere.

***Domestic versus public desire.*** Most of the shopkeepers who are involved in the selling of porn CDs don't share the exact nature of their business with their families, especially their wives. The wives are only told about the video shop business, but the fact that the shop contains videos with adult content is usually not disclosed. According to the shopkeepers I interviewed, wives respect Islamic and traditional 'values', are religious, and do not need to know their husbands' interests<sup>61</sup>. A silent approval on the part of the wives, who accept it and do not resist their husbands' actions, is a continuation of a patriarchal social order that endorses male desire as a natural occurrence and considers female desire an acquired and controlled emotion. There are some instances, however, when exceptional women have resisted to the extent that they have left their husbands, as I was told by Rubina Shaheen, the coordinator of a shelter home called Dastak. These women, according to Shaheen, seek divorce using the shelter home's resources and generally aim for another marital life of their choice.

The non-sharing with the family regarding the business of adult videos gives rise to further question regarding domesticity, such as, is female desire conceived in a complex way or is it positioned against a simple binary of public versus private? Most of the responses reaffirmed a particular frame of mind, which are argued below, with the exception of the few who considered female sexuality an integral component in any relationship. Sexual satisfaction and morality nonetheless emerged as an important dichotomy. They often presented sexual dissatisfaction in their matrimonial relations as a rational for excessive use of porn and mujra dance videos. Typical statements were, 'a domestic woman cannot fulfill our needs', and 'she is too busy with her household chores that she hardly has time for sex more than two or three times a week'. These statement were immediately followed by an explanation that, 'a woman who is chaste and domesticated will never initiate sex with her husband', and 'this is how we understand if the woman is of high value or belongs to lower strata of the society'. The dichotomy present in the desire of a female in the domestic sphere in relation to male desire shows the popular perception that sexually demanding and active women are the ones who have

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<sup>61</sup> Kashif. In an interview in Hall Road, Lahore. 2010.

experienced a variety of men. Constructing this kind of popular notion helps men negotiate better for the fulfillment of their illicit sexual desires.

For many men, fellatio is the desired sexual move, but they also consider it to be contrary to the moral and cultural values of Islamic tradition. If something is desired but is against the dominant traditions, how do they negotiate between the two? Women in the domestic sphere resist it, as explained by mujra producer and shopkeeper Khalid Jutt as, “sucking is a problem, and these days, men prefer sucking over fucking.” Sher Mohammad, his friend and fellow shopkeeper, further elaborated, ‘how can we put penises into the mouths of our wives who give birth to our children?’ this statement signals a higher value to his wife’s status in the domestic and social sphere, while playing with this hierarchy, they place lower position to their sex organ and thus carve justification for their penis’s rightful place in lower/fallen women. The respect he grants his wife in the domestic sphere also gives the man a license to express his sexual desire outside their homes with mujra dance performers. The woman who bears his children should not be lowered to that level of degradation, and she is also not to be seen as a sexual being with her own desires. The notion of desire attached to females is subject to their noble and vulgar background. Male desire is accepted as natural and female desire is subject to the whims of male desire, control, and perceptions of social construction.

Sher Mohammad’s son works at his father’s shop as an apprentice, but to maintain familial respect he doesn’t participate in the shoots of the semi-pornographic mujra dance videos, which his father organizes. They share the business of selling desire, but entertain themselves in different groups. Mohammad experiences the everyday negotiations of selling mujra videos in the same shop along with his son with the knowledge that his son is aware of his sexual adventures. His stance was very relaxed and established a sense of masculinity by acknowledging that his son is old enough to venture into this kind of business along with his father. The fine line is only between the actual practice and the business. The bond between father and son is cooperative, very effective in complying with the dynamics of economics and desire. They

both enjoy this business. But the son doesn't accompany his father on the same video making sessions. They remain silent over these issues while being fully aware of each other's activities and approving each other's sexualities and needs as well. According to Kimmel, silence is an important strategic move that disowns any debate about pornography, because, men consider pornography as an extension of his self and sexuality and any debate only threatens the privilege (2005). The statement explains that men understand the needs and desires of other men and support them even in the most complex relationships, but their silent approval of sexual desires becomes complicated if female sexuality and desire is placed in front of them.

***The question of female desire and morality.*** This segment examines how the female desire is viewed by males who advocate male desire and use techniques of negotiations to fulfill their desire. Their successful use of agency is viewed in relation with female agency in which she becomes the subject of desire and do not want to remain an object of desire. How do the shopkeepers view those women who purchase mujra and porn dance videos? This is another question that I articulated to understand the dichotomies and the complexities of male sexuality in relation to female desire. Salman, who made a famous Saturday night mujra dance video series, commented about female desire as, 'I could not believe when an educated modern woman came to the video shop (where he was standing) and demanded porn films. Imagine how low is the morality level of our society'.<sup>62</sup> I asked him what he thinks of his society in which men demand similar films for their enjoyment. He responded with a smile and used the popular Punjabi expression, "*sheran de moon kihne dhote*" (lions don't wash faces). Often the symbolic powers of animals are used in popular expressions to denote male body and desire. Using phrases like horsepower, or in the above instance a lion, the king of the jungle, means that males are free to do what they like. Another person blames the governments' family planning schemes that provide females with the freedom to experience sexual life because they are able to transcend the fear of pregnancy. When men use negotiating techniques, they have a concrete belief on their right to fulfill

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<sup>62</sup> Salman. In an interview in Lahore in 2006.



sexual desire. Salman's response on merely asking this simple question tells more about masculinity, how it wants to control women, the penalizing aspect in many parts of Pakistan, in which women are subject to harsh treatment and non-forgiveness for their sexual desire, and insecurity element of sexual desire. Making men feel challenged by more dominating women in public sphere and thus creates the duality of liking women in public sphere and keeping their women at home by labeling women in public arena as vulgar. This duality can be further examined by the statement of Kashif, the shopkeeper, that he feels if someone has only one wife, it means he is poor, and the poor man cannot even commit a rape, so you are left with only the choice of watching these mujra and porn CDs.<sup>63</sup> Kashif's disappointment about the poor man's inability to enjoy unlimited sexual options reflects on one level the class structure and perceptions about privileged people's sexual fulfillment, a notion I analyzed in the chapter of consumption of mujra dance videos, and on another level signals the natural privilege a man feels towards fulfilling his desire, even at the cost of violence.

This fear of female desire and sexual power is deeply rooted in history, and was always controlled by segregation, force, laws, and tradition, as Sheema Kirmani states in her article on female dance and the ideological state of Pakistan. She writes, 'in essence, women were considered dangerous to the social order because men were thought to be vulnerable to "feminine charms"' (1995, 112). This was expressed in my interviews with shopkeepers, who said they hold women responsible for the rapid decrease in societal morality, because they have increasingly seen women indulging in the consumption of these dance videos. For them, it affects women and consequently society if women cater to their carnal needs. When I discussed this with a female consumer of pornography, she very strongly supported people who view these videos because she considered it an outlet to unleash their fantasies and imaginations, and experience what society would otherwise inhibit them from expressing. As stated earlier, the myths around sexuality in the Pakistani cultural context are generally operated around its relation to history and

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<sup>63</sup> He meant that a poor man is not well connected with authority personal. Therefore, he is always scared of breaking law and thus cant commit rape.

nature. Mai Ghoussoub deconstructs the fears of Arab males regarding insatiable women, which are rooted and 'deeply imprinted on their inherited memory' (2006, 230). The dichotomies, which were presented, reveal the patriarchal social order that places male sexuality against female sexuality, creating a relational dynamism, which is full of contradiction, power struggle and control. The male desire's negotiation with female desire takes several positions, and all are complex. The hypocrisy, as discussed in the beginning of the this chapter works best as a technique when men deals with religious ideology, since the whole social structure understands these modes and techniques and performs accordingly, whether they are from media or authority. In the next section, I analyze on the similar grounds how male desire negotiate with state rules and authority. The section uses the analysis presented here as a springboard to examine the complexity of males desire by examining the case of female singers and dancers' and the state's role, in which they continue to accept/justify male desire and condemn female desire.

### ***Male desire and the state***

This section interrogates male desire and its negotiations with the state's rule and authority, and formulates analysis on the framework developed in the argument of the previous sections. I articulate how religious morality and the question of female desire are interlinked in negotiating desire with the state's institutions. These negotiations range from dealing with police raids to the question of public morality. In the first part, I present a scenario in which shopkeepers explain in detail their techniques of negotiation to deal with governmental power and control over sexual practices, then, I present a case of famous female singer Naseebo Lal who was banned several times by the High Court. These two scenarios are then examined against the interview conducted with representative of police and follows by my analysis.

***Trade Union's negotiations for distribution of desire.*** To safeguard the interest of the shopkeepers, union leaders negotiate their way through the state infrastructure and law-enforcing agents. The police, high officials, parliamentarians, journalists, lawyers, and others are considered influential contacts to keep the piracy, porn, and other illegal businesses safe from raids.

The shopkeeper, Khalid Jutt, explain that whenever there is a threat of police raid, the Trade Union is informed beforehand. The Union leader then demands that the shopkeepers put some sample porn DVDs in a box, label it with their shop's name, and give it to the Trade Union leader for police confiscation. Then the Trade Union leader presents the police and other relevant officials this 'confiscated' material along with a submission note that ensures that they will control the sale of such materials, and that, therefore, the officials should not raid the shops. Approximately two weeks later all the shops are returned their DVDs packets, and are told to be careful to start their porn business in a low-key manner. This is a pattern followed by all the shopkeepers. After any police raid, it takes about a month for these businesses to return to full swing. In the meantime the porn and sensational mujra dance videos are sold to regular trusting customers only, out of fear of any police action. Jutt further informed me that the police, even the higher officials like Deputy Superintendent Police, are some of the biggest customers of these porn videos. Without any qualms about his sensitive position, the DSP comes in his full uniform and buys a whole months' stock in one visit. 'This is called the enjoyment, Asian man's enjoyment', he chuckled<sup>64</sup>. The negotiations with state officials, at comfortable level, are primarily achieved through the desire of the police, who are also males in this instance. How the police view females involved in these sexual practices, is a complex question, which controls females through their perception of morality and vulgarity, while offering males space to exercise their sexual freedom.

***Naseebo Lal: an icon of obscenity.*** Naseebo is the most famous Punjabi singer who is heard and enjoyed unanimously across Pakistan, especially in the Punjab. She emerged as a star with her famous album, *Desan da Raja* in 1999 and recorded more than 1500 songs for films as well as her own albums. Her songs, which are mainly composed and sung for Punjabi films, are then used in the mujra dance videos as background music on which dancers perform explicit sexual movements at the direction of the producers.

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<sup>64</sup> Khalid Jutt in interview in Lahore, 2010.

In 2009, a petition was filed by Mehmood Khan in Lahore High Court accusing Punjabi Singer Naseebo Lal of singing sexually illicit songs, which resulted in her being banned from singing in public performances, as well as the prohibition of further sale and circulation of her songs<sup>65</sup>. In her statement before the court Naseebo Lal blamed the producer of the music video, who forced her to sing these vulgar songs by threatening her life<sup>66</sup>. I visited her in her home in 2010 summer. She was living in the most underprivileged locality on the outskirts of Lahore, in her seemingly impoverished interior of the house. Playing with her two-year-old son on the lap, she appeared to be very upset when she said, 'what should I do when people who are so powerful and dangerous force me to sing such songs?' Being scared for her family's wellbeing, she requested the producer to stand by her in dire consequences. Now she asked, 'why I am the only one who is being targeted among all these responsible people?'<sup>67</sup>



Fig. 1.8: Naseebo Lal in her home in 2010. She asked to be photographed as a researcher. She took my notepad and eyeglasses and wrote a phrase as an autograph for me.

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<sup>65</sup> *Asif Mehmood vs Central Government*. Writ petition no. 7867/2009. Lahore.

<sup>66</sup> Staff report, "PEMRA, Punjab govt ordered to report on measures against 'vulgarity'", Daily Times, July 21, 2009. Accessed: on 10.09.2009 at 2:00 pm [http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2009%5C07%5C21%5Cstory\\_21-7-2009\\_pg13\\_3](http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2009%5C07%5C21%5Cstory_21-7-2009_pg13_3),

<sup>67</sup> Naseebo Lal in an interview in Lahore, 2010.

She is the only person accused in the petition, whereas the main beneficiaries of the songs including the producer, lyricist, and financier, are not held responsible. This bias against women singers emerged again during a discussion with the Station House Officer (hereafter SHO) Abid Rasheed, posted at Civil Lines Police Station (please see the location of the police station in the Fig 1.2). He ridiculed Naseebo Lal's justification and said, 'you know what kind of women are these, it's not possible to sing in such sweet voice if one's life is under threat'<sup>68</sup>. The problem in his response is not his casual attitude towards the accused, but his perception that these women belong to a low category and are considered 'fallen' because of their involvement with the sex industry. The way Rasheed used these words to express his sentiments about female singers as 'bad' women complicate the notion of obscenity, gender, and law. How can the state's representative not give any credence to the accused's explanation before she is proven guilty by the court? This is a pertinent question to understand the relationship of gender with the state. Lal never denied singing the alleged songs, but instead demanded that the other responsible and powerful people who produce such songs be brought forward. Rasheed did not hold the producer and other males responsible for a rise of obscenity in the society. Would the obscenity cease to be an offence against males is itself subject to deeper scrutiny.

Rasheed considered sex workers and women performing in the public sphere to be 'fallen' women, but did not feel the need to use the morality yardstick on the participating 'culprit' who is the male buyer of sex. No one questions the conduct of the males who consume these products of desire, participate in sexual acts with these 'fallen' women, and are in the business of making such videos with the intention of making money from sexually explicit material. Instead, these men's behaviors are accepted unconditionally. Rasheed did acknowledge the presence of "double standards for men and women", but he maintained that men have certain "natural" needs, and therefore it is understandable to accept male active participation in sexual activities that are unlawful and not allowed by the religion. For him women

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<sup>68</sup> SHO Abid Rasheed in an interview in Lahore, 2010.

are not to take such liberties. Instead, they should always remember their virtue and be able to control their desires; comments position him as a male and do not make a neutral policeman. As stated earlier, female sexual needs are never openly entertained and accepted as natural, as the social order prescribes. Women are accepted to express their sexuality only by depriving themselves of respect. Their sexuality is perceived differently -- while the law does not differentiate based on gender, the law enforcing agents do.

The case against Naseebo Lal was filed by a man whose friend was traveling with his mother and sister in a public bus, and the driver played some famous songs by Naseebo Lal. The obscenity entered the close and intimate space of the van only when the petitioner's friend became conscious of his mother and sister's presence among other male passengers. This was not the only public van that played her songs, and the fact that the man had never enjoyed listening to these songs before is important to articulate. In Lawrence Liang's study of Indian Cinema and censorship, he argues that it is not the cinema itself, but rather the person who is watching it that makes it evil. The regular daily experience of travelling in public transport in the modern urbanity of Lahore means being stuffed in with other people, gazing out of the window at other objects as spectacles in a mundane daily activity.

Liang, referring to Guy Debord and Ravi Sundaram, states that the experience of modern life is merely the 'accumulation of spectacles' of a life which was once lived, where 'detached from life images become autonomous, producing a reality that is but pseudo-real' (2006, 27). It is simple to state that the obscene songs of Naseebo Lal carry the appeal of mere spectatorship without any lived experience of sexual excitement during everyday travel in the city. The 'lifeless' songs, to use Liang's term, suddenly became alive once the petitioner's friend realized that he was accompanied by 'females' who were his mother and sister, and there were not any other females traveling aboard whom he could fantasize about. But the man's underlying fear, accentuated by the lascivious songs, was that the other males in the van viewed his female relatives as their objects of desire. Seeing other women as objects of desire, and imagining other males desiring his family members,

harbors complex dynamics to the notion of vulgarity. The reason the other men sitting in the van did not object to the vulgarity of the songs is because fantasies in a public space are acceptable as long as the object in the fantasy is not related to the person who is fantasizing. Morality and ethics enter the sexuality discourse after one ceases to fantasize and is obstructed by one's own female family members. This obstruction of one's fantasy, and fear of other's fantasies, leads to the legal action that targeted Naseebo Lal only.

***The Law Enforcing Agents and Desire.*** Despite many court orders banning mujra dance practices, mujra dances continue to circulate openly in pornographic and semi-pornographic CDs at Hall Road. According to SHO Rasheed these are in open disobedience of court orders, while shopkeepers told me that the police get monthly '*bhatta*' (bribery) for the business to continue. Some further alleged that most of the police officers are consumers of the mujra videos, as I noted earlier. In some sex scandal videos, a low-ranking police officer is shown in an intimate situation with a sex worker, revealing how the police are imagined, and how their open exhibition of desire is accepted.

On the question of this open display of desire, Rasheed explained that sometimes when dancers are arrested for vulgar and obscene acts it is due to other factors which are a powerful force in these sexual practices. For instance, he explained, a dancer/singer might refuse to provide sex to some police official or other influential person, and therefore as punishment she is arrested. He supported his argument by narrating an incident when some SHO and SSP were simultaneously involved in an illicit relationship with the same dancer. Upon finding the involvement of the SHO with the dancer, the SSP suspended the SHO from his post as a punishment for his alleged involvement with the dancer of his choice. According to Rasheed's understanding, whenever there is an arrest it is because of some involvement of a police officer or influential person. His admission reveals that the police are in fact subservient to desire, although they claim to be controlling sexual practices in the name of morality and religious ideology.

This leniency on the part of the court and police also triggered a brief debate in the Punjab Assembly. The Punjab Assembly is situated next to the Alfalah Theatre, as shown in Fig.1.3. The opposition MPA alleged that the vulgar dances were still being performed despite the fact these are banned by the High Court, and that the police were letting these practices flourish. After some debate, the Information Minister said that he would look into the matter. At this note the Speaker dismissed the assembly by saying ‘since we have got the reassurance from the Interior Minister, we should now move to another *tehrrik* (issue)’. Rasheed and the shopkeepers of Hall Road all had a similar reaction to this decision, which they recognized as a political move to pressurize the government, since they believe that every politician is involved in some sort of illegal and illicit sexual scandal<sup>69</sup>. It clearly highlights the argument I have constructed so far about the agency of power and the repressive sexual hypothesis where one continues to find hair-splitting discussions and directives over issues, but no concrete action in terms of legalities or law enforcement has been observed.

Salman Ghani, former Secretary of Culture and Information in the Punjab Government, commented on the practice of these dances and Naseebo Lal’s songs allegedly being banned, saying, “there are some people who enjoy watching these dances and listening to sexually explicit songs. We should just let them be....”<sup>70</sup>. But for him, the problem of regulating sexual practices is very complex, because it means to endorse citizen’s rights. He further stated that this nation believes in hypocrisy and double standards, and that everyone believes that Pakistan is a virtuous nation where nothing vulgar or against the value of Islam exists. This is a belief that “saves us a lot of trouble”, he chuckled. For him, hypocrisy is a perfect tool for dealing with the complex phenomena taking place in the country, especially in the face of the ideological position of the state, which regards its society as religious and pious.

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<sup>69</sup> YouTube, “PML(N) Law Minister Punjab Rana Sana Ullah Scandal” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L\\_m7jTrcAQw&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L_m7jTrcAQw&feature=related)

<sup>70</sup> Ghani, Salman. former Secretary of Culture and Information, interview on 17<sup>th</sup> July 2011 in Lahore.



To further explain the hypocrisy and dichotomies present in the above material, I will return to Runciman's discussion of hypocrisy. For Runciman, 'first-order hypocrisy is the ubiquitous practice of concealing vice as virtue, which makes up the parade of our social existence'. Whereas, the 'second-order hypocrisy pretends that the parade itself is a form of genuinely virtuous, and therefore self-denying behavior'. To conclude, he states that we may need to hide the truth about ourselves in order to get by in this world, but 'we oughtn't to hide the truth *from* ourselves that this is what we are doing.' (2008, 54). The shopkeepers and police officers practice illegal and illicit sexual actions while condemning and controlling others who engage in the same actions. This debate of second and first order is not used here to judge any particular practice, but to use it to understand how it helps boasting male desire. Thus, the first order, pretending to be virtuous in everyday life, sheds its weight and lets the 'real' desire surface among male company.

However, since desire is not that simple a notion, it becomes complicated when the first order dictates boasting sexuality to a larger-than-life scale so that masculinity is saved from the ridicule of other males. The first order is done so often that it also blurs the distinctions sometimes and let it overcome. It might be easier to assign first order and second order conceptually, but it is very difficult to understand in real life who are first-order and who are the second-order hypocrites. As noted by Runciman, and seemingly appropriate for Pakistani society, 'Mandeville was writing about a society in which hypocrisy was ubiquitous, which is one of the reasons that it is a society we can recognize' (Ibid., 72). Mandeville defines a malicious hypocrite as one who is aware of the masks and appears to be pious and religious. On being given an opportunity the malicious hopes that he is trusted in order to be villains. Fashionable hypocrites, on the other hand, are not interested in having any real motive in religion but just perform rituals in order to appear to be a part of society, and they are not interested in being singled out. For Mandeville, the latter is the non-harmful type. In the analysis of the above dichotomies present in politics at the state level, such as the previously discussed VCR and the removal of tax duties during the Zia period, would constitute the first type, the

malicious, according to Mandeville. The practices of people who like to be part of a religious followership but also deviate in order to attain pleasure, on the other hand, would be categorized as fashionable hypocrites. A diagram drawn by SHO Rasheed regarding the political structure of power in Pakistani society, explains how power structure is perceived. While sitting at his table drinking tea, with junior police officers coming into the room for various tasks, he made a drawing of a circle and dissected it into four equal parts. He called the first part the professional and ethical police. The second part was called media, the third part was law, and the fourth part was influential citizens. He pointed at the first segment, professional and ethical police, and said, 'even if I try to be a very professional police officer, I still comprise of the quarter of the whole in the power structure. In order to survive in my job, I need to have the approval of the media people, lawyers and the judges and of course the powerful citizens who have money, which comprises of the trade unions, industrialist and others with immense political influence and power'. He called it his diagram of power structure and stated 'no one can perform their duties honestly because we are all bound in this vicious power circle'. Very appropriately drawn, his diagram encapsulated the argument about the open presence and consumption of pornographic and semi-pornographic videos, including mujra dances in Hall Road, in close proximity to the High Court, the Civil Line Police Station, and the Punjab Assembly. This diagram reveals his inability in exercising his agency within the larger power structure. For my analysis, I argue that the larger structure, comprised of both state and social religious order, is oppressive, in the similar sensibility of oppressive hypothesis discussed in the beginning of this chapter. However, male desire finds enough tools and techniques of negotiations which enable it to fulfill desire. Rasheed however, may not have the agency to challenge the political power asserted by powerful people, but on a smaller individual level, he is able to decide to use his agency by using the same rules and regulations of the state to fulfill his desire, thus subverting the state on a minor level. All these 'minor' negotiations for sexual fulfillment are, therefore, the volcanic eruptions that surround discursive mujra dance practices with subversive negotiations.

I argued that the presence of religion, morality, and patriarchal notions of controlling female desire form a complex structure where new media and technology serves as an empowering tool which serves to help practice male sexual desire in a religious society. These then generate hypocritical behaviors that are rendered in this chapter as dichotomies. The hypocritical behaviors that first deny and dismiss the presence and indulgence in any sexually illicit materials, later on celebrate the masculine desire as a natural and necessary force. I have articulated these denials as a necessary power tool to be able to negotiate successfully male sexual desire with orthodox social religious order and oppressive state's rule. These dichotomies, I argue, surround everyone's perceptions, making male desire complex as well as helping people make do with overt morality and religious ideology. The urban geography of Hall Road as a site of dichotomous behaviors, and negations places the ground of mujra dance practices on which male desire assert their agency. This chapter strategically articulated the power structures in sexual discourse, whereas, next chapter explains mujra dance video's production formed on the contextual framework developed in this chapter.





Fig. 1.9 Several shots of Hall road where hawkers on the street are openly selling CDs which include mujra dance videos

## Chapter 2

## **The Production of Mujra Dance Videos: A Transition Through Film and Stage Shows to Digital Format Dance Videos**

In this chapter, I present the production of mujra dance video in conjunction with its aesthetic relations with Pakistani Cinema. The transition of mujra dance, from cinema to live dance shows on theater [within cinema hall buildings] is further mediated through the use of digital technologies including DVDs. The examination of the descriptive analysis of the Pakistani film industry and the transformation of media help us study the changing Pakistani Film Industry which in some instances, is developing uniquely in relationship with other cinematic tradition of South Asia. It further aims to contribute to the larger scholarship of changing trends on aspects of film and video culture in the region by adding how Pakistani cinema coexisted, changed, and formed its own style into a dance video format in South Asia. In the previous chapter, I argued that, for the fulfillment of sexual desire, masculinity has devised strategic tools and technologies of negotiations to counter oppressive religious ideology and rules of the state. This chapter explains the process through which these negotiations are met and fulfilled.

The first section addresses obvious visible aesthetic links of Pakistani/Punjabi<sup>71</sup> cinema with the production of mujra dance video sensibility and analyzes several genres created in the mujra dance video category. The aesthetics developed during the oppressive and hostile political environment of Zia-ul Haq's military rule, were crudely obscene and obsessed with violence and sexual symbolism. I position my framework on the argument developed by Lotte Hoek's study of obscene 'cut-pieces' in Bangladesh's film industry, in which she recognizes the existence of 'cut-

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<sup>71</sup> I use the term Pakistani cinema in this thesis for overall understanding of aesthetics and development of Urdu and other regional film industry, but in this chapter and the next in which I analyze the visual and lyrical content of the videos, I often use Punjabi Cinema, primarily because the times in which Pakistani cinema flourished during Zia period was the rise of Punjabi film and consequently it influenced Pakistani regional cinema, like Pashto films.

pieces' as an 'indication of the disintegration of Bangladesh's polity...on the other hand, cut-pieces produce fantasies' (Hoek 2013, p4). In this chapter I argue that, the way obsessive sexual imagery within mujra dance videos is constructed and produced, reveals masculine agency in fulfilling sexual desire while negotiating the oppressive ideologies articulated in the previous chapter. The producers of mujra dance videos have used the term *mazaa* to explain pleasure which hints at the space of sexual fantasies traversing above the layers of intricate networks of piracy, ideologies of state and religious moralists, corrupt system, and female desire. I explain in this section that the 'aesthetic formations' of mujra dance production is also a logical outcome of a hostile political environment that discouraged Pakistani cinema and other creative entertainment expressions. Many cultural analyses consider this period as culturally void and in a vacuum; however, I argue that alternate creative expressions formed to express hostilities of the time and violent depiction of corruption. These creative forms are what Brian Larkin has attributed to the production of video drama genre in Nigeria, borne out of the circulation of pirated videos of Bollywood and Pakistani cinema. I further argue in this chapter that due to the lack of state patronage, which resulted in the demise of the film industry and cinema theaters, live mujra dance shows in comedy stage theaters filled the so-called cultural vacuum, eventually transforming first into a VHS and then a digital mujra dance format. The same period saw the conversion of major cinema halls into stage theatres offering live comedy shows with mujra dances to lure male sexual desires.

The second section explains the mechanism and techniques employed for the production of mujra dance videos. I examine how the notion of *mazaa* to fulfill sexual desire acts as an agency and empowers laypersons to produce mujra dance videos with technological ease and crude editing aesthetics. In most mujra videos, producers select the performers not because of their ability and dance skills, but because of their willingness to expose their bodies. The descriptive narrative of the producers reveals their ease in handling digital technologies without any prerequisite training in film and video production. These expressions of desire have led original distributors

of video films and stage shows at Hall Road to become producers of mujra videos, and an examination of their narratives explains how these distributors-turned-producers formed sexual relationships with the dancers in the videos. The mujra dance video is aimed at the sexual fantasies of male consumers, which is generally packaged after the producers have had sexual experiences with the dancers. These mujra dance videos become the media, to use Hoeks' definition of medium (Hoek 2013, p16) representing sexual desire of the producers in order to incite sexual fantasies of the consumers by the absence of object (subjectivity of producers in this case), and by reproducing the 'absent object present' (association of maza while making of these videos for the consumers).

In the first chapter I presented the discursive practices, hypocrisy, tools and techniques of negotiations with the wider social moralist ideologies and with the forces of law enforcement. I argued that the dominant socio-cultural discourse imagines Pakistani society as pious, virtuous and Muslim, whereas in contrast one continues to find ambiguities in the expression of sexual desire that complicates any sort of moral and religious narrative. These negotiations, rather than overtly defying these ideological discourse, are indirectly subversive of the dominant religious discourse, by forming a strong sense of 'Muslimness and piety', while fulfilling illicit sexual desire. This chapter poses a set of smaller questions that consequently inform the focus of the study and the main thesis question of masculinity in present day Pakistani society and how it is constructed, represented, and understood through digital technologies. These questions include: how and what are the dominant expressions of desire being served by the mass production of such videos? How are aesthetics from different sources, such clips from western porn films, employed to make a product that fulfills male sexual desire? And most importantly, do they negotiate with the dominant discourse prevalent in the society or is it a simple, blatant expression of their desire? The presentation of these materials in this chapter lays down the foundation stone of mujra dance video as a central product, set against the everyday negotiations of male desire with socio-religious Pakistani discourse.



### ***Tracing Mujra Dance in Punjabi Cinema***

As I have already explained in the previous chapter, the cultural significance of Lahore, it is pertinent to trace the production of mujra dance videos by briefly looking at the background of local cinema before Independence and how it continued to influence Pakistani cinema. Before 1947, Lahore was the second center of the regional film industry after Bombay (Visvanath & Malik 2009, Vasudevan 2010). When India was divided, Pakistan inherited five to six studios, which were originally owned by Hindu producers and directors. After partition, the situation shifted, and migrating Muslims took charge of these studios. For some time the quality of cinema in Pakistan continued to be high and professional (Gazdar 1997, and Nasir Adeeb in interview in 2010). Initially the films that were made in Lahore carried on the Hindu mythological story and had a set narrative. That also helped the exchange of films between the two countries, which was routine at that time. Many read the initial period of Pakistani cinema as conducive to make films even after the tumultuous and traumatic aftermath of huge migration across the border (Malik 2009). In another significant doctoral study, which reviews Indian cinema during the British Raj before partition, Vasudevan points at the significant element of production in the cinema of Lahore that helped develop the city as a major production center of regional films. He states that, 'repertoire of musical performance cinema was part of a wider arc of film production and distribution beyond the subcontinent' (2010). A few years after independence, in 1956, however, it was considered appropriate to ban import, distribution, and screening of Indian films in Pakistan after the cultural environment quickly became hostile, as stated by Nasir Adeeb, a scriptwriter of a large number of Punjabi films. The move to support the local film industry continued in Bangladesh even after independence from Pakistan (Hoek, 2014 p5). On the other hand, the Pakistani film critic Mushtaq Gazdar, in his analysis of this formative period, states that the ban on screening Bombay films was received with much celebration by Pakistani film producers, as it guaranteed a non-competitive local market for Pakistani film circulation (Gazdar 1997, 52). These accounts inform the significant position Lahore held within film circuits, and I connect

my research with the production environment of Lahore, highlighted by Vasudevan, and states that mujra dance videos are a logical continuation of the historic film tradition of this city. This production tradition, I argue, did not disappoint the entertainment lovers for its love of musical performances and the film medium even after the orthodox rule of general Zia-ul-Haq from 1979-88, and transformed itself from film production in the studios to digital mujra dance videos with live stage mujra shows serving as the middle phase of the transformation phenomenon.

During the 1970s, filmmakers of Punjabi cinema started to incorporate dance scenes that comprised typical mujra dance forms with lewd body movements. The dance sequences usually showed semi-nude dancers with translucent dresses drenched in rain, a perfect stimulant for fantasy and desire. These scenes were often juxtaposed against earlier scenes showing, in elaborate detail, violent and brutal acts of sexual harassment and/or rape, a true representation of the collapse of political system and social injustices of the time, as is also noted by Hoek. The Censor Board cut these films, but to some extent producers with connections were able to get away with some explicit scenes, a practice reminiscent of Pakistani cinema's wider connection with cut-piece illicit film circuits in South Asia. The censored portions were called *totay* (cut-pieces), and were archived during the rigid rule of Zia-ul-Haq. This term, *totey* is still widely used in designating any material that is sexually explicit, whether that material is from the film industry of Pakistan or not. These *totey* were then compiled together and screened illegally, sometimes in between the regular film screenings or as a separate collection in small, notorious cinema halls, located in the alleys and dingy roads of Lahore (Gazdar 1997, 167). The audience of Punjabi cinema, just like Bollywood and Pakistani Urdu cinema, mainly watched the films for the dance sequences and the exaggerated shows of violence. The decline of Urdu Cinema since the time of martial law under General Zia-ul-Haq helped popularize Pashto film songs and dances with an exaggerated display of sexuality, which in turn influenced Punjabi film dances. The aesthetics of *totey* during the period of martial rule continued in the present-day genres of

mujra videos, by incorporating montages from porn films.



Fig. 2.1 The two images above depict a typical façade of a cinema theatre showing a male face with exaggerated dark painted strokes. The female dancer in this film hoarding is shown in a typical move, which has become the hallmark of mujra dance in videos. I took this image in 2005 to document the changes in the cinema board paintings.

Inserting totey or cut-pieces is a practice not exclusive to Punjabi films. Pashto films, quick to market films with illicit porn imagery, soon infiltrated cinemas in Lahore. I remember seeing many posters of Pashto films during the 1980s, when I was a high school student, on the cinema facades of McLeod Road and Abbot Road, two roads famous for their cinema halls adjacent to Mall Road. The extreme violence on the face of the hero in the posters was depicted through bold strokes of blue and red paint, while he was complemented by the presence of a heavily built fair-complexioned heroine wearing skin-tight westernized clothes. The full Figure of the heroine was always rendered with markings to cover the cleavage, with a promise to

offer much more in the film. Fig. 2.1 shows a heroine wearing a green skin-tight shirt beneath her *choli* (blouse), whereas in the actual scene in the film she is shown wearing this same dress but without the green undershirt. The fantasy that is provoked and promised is only possible through negating the exposure of sexual body parts. I argue that these very markings and coverings were doubly beneficial as a negotiating strategy with a government bent on controlling expressions of desire in the public sphere. Where it successfully warded off authoritarian and moralist proponents of society, it also helped the male audience to fantasize the invisible, to be shown on screen inside the cinema, a successful use of mediation of a desired object (Hoek 2014). This realm of presence and absence of covering body parts is popularly known among the painters of these cinema board paintings as *masala*’ (meaning spicy and sexual flavor).<sup>72</sup> Splicing of pornography in Pashto films is noted by Milan Hulsing<sup>73</sup>, whereas, Ali Ahmed and Ali Khan explains porn cut-piece inserted into Pashto films as,

The liberal sprinkling of ‘vulgarity’ in Pashto cinema – titillating dance sequences pushed past the censors by influential backers of the films – has led to the genre as a whole being described as misogynist...and many of the films are themselves spliced with actual pornography when shown in local cinema houses. (Khan and Ahmed, 2010, 157).

This practice was a norm in Lahore cinemas during the era of Zia-ul-Haq. During my field research, a former army officer told me a story about his experience of accidentally viewing pornography along with his children. He took his young kids to see a Chinese Kung Fu film in Plaza Cinema<sup>74</sup>, Lahore. The gatekeeper at the entrance smiled at him and commented that he was daring to bring the kids to the show. The officer didn’t understand what the gatekeeper meant at the entrance door, but his meaning soon became clear when the film changed from an action film to a series of *totey* from the western clips and Pashto dances in the middle of the Chinese Kung Fu film.

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<sup>72</sup> I conducted fieldwork for my Masters by Research in 2001, in which I analyzed the politics of cinema board making and the popular cultural identity.

<sup>73</sup> Milan, Hulsing. Pashto horror films in Pakistan’, *Wasafiri* 19, no. 43 (2004): 53-57

<sup>74</sup> Plaza Cinema is one of the old cinema halls, which I refer to in the literature review of Lahore while describing the culture of Lahore during British times.

When he confronted the manager, he realized his naivety for not understanding the 'hidden' message on the advertisement on the poster.

In this chapter, by examining the influences of this period in the shifting aesthetics of dance form in Pakistani cinema, I argue that Punjabi film particularly helped shift dancers from *kothas* (performing dance space in a brothel house) and/or wedding parties where the male audience would enjoy the women's dance in a circular seated formation, to the film screen to become the object of desire (refer to Fig. 2.2). The shift of dance style led to the formation of *mujra* dance aesthetics, which dominated the popular digital circuits of Lahore after two decades. The violence and sexual fantasy became the main ingredient of film scripts. The typical storyline in Punjabi Cinema from 1979 through the early 1980s centered on a hero who poses a challenge to the oppressive structures of the establishment. The heroine is usually shown as a beautiful and vulnerable village damsel. The corrupt feudal elements present in the heroine's village, including rogues, thugs, and powerful *Chaudhrys* (big land owners), want to possess her. The film story then positions the hero to save the heroine from her rapists/abductors, and from the warring gang present in the village that are in conflict with the hero's clan. The hero's attempts to save the heroine's honor lead to fighting and bloodshed, from which the hero eventually emerges victorious over the evil elements of society. After these violent scenes of bloodshed, the heroine starts dancing in abundance to express her gratitude to the hero, who is rewarded by her alluring and explicit sensual dance moves. These settings in the story line help people, who generally feel oppressed in society, identify with the hero, and subsequently enjoy the heroine's dance that caters to their fantasies. The obsessive use of violent imagery juxtaposed with sexual fantasy is a typical hallmark of porn and sexually illicit film imagery. The active hero, fighting the cruelties of the establishment ignites viewers to identify with his heroic actions to forget in that action-filled moment the vulnerabilities of real life struggles, whereas sexually inactive hero watching female dancing to attain his attention with seductive poses helps eliminate the hero's figure in viewer's imagination and fantasy. This marked the end of

duet songs with both the hero and heroine dancing in Pakistani Urdu Cinema, and henceforward mujra dance form evolved in the Punjabi cinema with only a woman dancing for male sexual desire.



Fig. 2.2 On the left is the cover image of film *Umrao Jan Ada* made in 1972. The heroine Rani acted as a courtesan and is shown performing a traditional mujra. The image on the right side is a dance scene from a film *Miss Kalashankoaf*. The heroine is in a typical dance in ecstasy.

The emergence of mujra dance movements in Punjabi cinema is also woven in the socio-political fabric of the 70's and onwards when Islamic morality and values took a strong hold after the partition (Gazdar 1997, Kirmani 1995, Nasir Adeeb and Suhail Khan in an interview 2010). Zia's regime was geared to cleanse the society of all the 'western' and Hindu elements such as kite flying, dance, and music (Toor 2011, 151). As stated earlier, the rise in intolerant religious positions was professed and actively pursued by the sub-branches of religious parties such as Jamat-e-Islami in the universities during Martial Rule. Maulana Maudoodi, the founder of this religious and political party, laid the foundation for the Islamic Jamiat-e-Taliba immediately after Pakistan's inception in December 1947. Soon afterwards, it became the Avant-garde of social morality and Islamic values according to their interpretation of the teachings of Islam. During Zia-ul-

Haq's religious military rule, they started a vocal and ferocious activism against cultural activities that involved women in the public space, such as theater and dance, and even activities such as walking in a park or along roadsides in the company of a woman.<sup>75</sup> In those times people's sexuality was controlled with moral policing, which directly targeted women's sexuality, contributing to the portraying of female sexuality as an objectified being in other sites of performative spaces. The overtly oppressive and coercive political environment helped generate productive means through which people created and devised ways of expressing their sexual desires, which could bypass the direct morality code imposed by state and religious-political groups, whether the Pakistan Censor-board or billboard advertisements, with crisscross hatchings on exposed female body parts.

The moralists hold women performers in these 'obscene' dances responsible for the overall breaking down of Pakistani film Industry. I contacted Nasir Adeeb, a scriptwriter of more than three hundred Punjabi films, who also created the legendary masculine Punjabi hero *Maula Jutt* at the beginning of Zia-ul-Haq's eleven years long military rule. Adeeb was involved with the Pakistani Film Industry from the early 1970s. In his seventies, he invited me for lunch at his home when I called him to ask about a time for an interview. He enthusiastically sat for a very long interview and articulated with great ease his own anxieties as a young male that propelled him to write the legendary hero *Maula Jutt*, a character that became the signature of Punjabi cinema. Nasir Adeeb criticized Punjabi films for their poor quality in comparison with the cinema of earlier times. While reviewing the demise of the work ethics and values of Pakistani cinema, he stated that the film industry distanced itself from larger society because of its close association with prostitutes. According to him these prostitutes became actresses, and thus 'maligned' the film environment with their reputation<sup>76</sup>.

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<sup>75</sup> Islami Jamiat e Talaba Pakistan. Accessed: September 4, 2011 at 6:47 pm. [http://jamiat.org.pk/new/index.php?func=page\\_cms&cms\\_id=75](http://jamiat.org.pk/new/index.php?func=page_cms&cms_id=75),

<sup>76</sup> I am careful in keeping the translation of the sentences uttered by Nasir Adeeb in the similar spirit. Any kind of derogatory expression should be excused because I don't share the same sentiments about the prostitutions.

The involvement of courtesans, nautch girls, and prostitutes in theater and then Hindi cinema is traced from its earliest period about Indian Cinema during British times, according to the vast literature. Indian cinema is indebted to the performances of the courtesans displaced after the British Raj who found new venues to earn their living while entertaining men through theater and consequently film. The tradition of hiring courtesans for Hindi films, according to Bhaumik as cited by Ravi Vasudevan, was 'culled from a range of different sources, including Punjab....and the broader tradition of an "Islamicate" culture of bazaar' (Bhaumik 2001). Vasudevan further explains, while describing the early Hindi cinema before 1947, that the poetry and musical performance of the courtesan 'flowed into the mise-en-scene, musical forms, and narrative cultures of the cinema' (Ibid.). This literature maintains that performative and musical narrative culture initiated by the courtesans influenced the later narratives of Indian cinema, i.e. Bollywood.

In Pakistan, on the other hand, the contribution of courtesans is seldom recognized in the flourishing of popular cultural forms, including theater and cinema. Muslim society after the inception of Pakistan did not give much recognition to the role and significance of courtesans and thus relegated them a category of prostitutes only. Another Punjabi film producer, Suhail Khan, through holding prostitutes responsible for low quality films, stressed the need for attracting talented actresses and actors from universities and colleges so that the film industry could revive itself.<sup>77</sup> Nasir Adeeb commented that in post-independence Pakistani society, cinema going was regarded vulgar, often resulting in youth watching films without prior knowledge of their parents. He further continued that for a society which does not approve of its own industry and its own creative powers, for any

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This is also to be noted that this is the common expression when one is discussing the female sex workers or women who have 'dubious' character/profession.

<sup>77</sup> Suhail Khan, in his interview in 2010 in his office in Lahore. He is the media manger of the new production house and the producer. He stressed on the need of getting more educated people in the industry so that it can get rid of the label of the diamond market.



woman/girl to work in a film would be '*bohhot mayoob baat*' (quite sinful). After the exodus of 1947, many actors, and actresses left Lahore for Bombay, therefore, the producers and directors filled the vacuum by hiring female cast from the *Heera Mandi*<sup>78</sup>. He further explained that in competition for new films, these prostitutes/actresses started offering sex and staging parties with alcohol for film producers, as stardom also promised higher value in the sex market. For him, this attitude tinted the industry after which any women from educated and 'good' backgrounds would not enter the film industry for the sake of art and creativity. The similar concerns are often expressed in the Urdu paper in the entertainment section by using derogatory terms for the performers and holding them responsible for morality of society. Despite the fact that this practice is the continuation of an earlier tradition of employing courtesans for films, the female performers continue to receive the criticism, in the absence of serious debate on lack of state patronage, absence of cultural policies, and, the training of the directors and producers. The dismissal of the above reiterate the moralist position cemented further in the process of Islamization by labeling this industry of '*kanjar*' cast (which literally means a cast of people who earn their livelihood by singing, dancing, and prostitution). The attitude of framing female performers as sex objects for personal gratification of producers continues in the practices of self-taught producers of *mujra* dance videos which I examine in the second section of this chapter.

Once thriving with film productions, the cinema halls and studios are now in shambles. Abbott Road, close to Mall Road, was once famous for its cinema theaters. It had around ten cinema halls which were always full of people, but that today appear to be haunted places for moviegoers reduced to merely a prime food destination. The absence of a concrete cultural policy, and the consistent non-recognition of the film industry by all governments since the 1970s has also played a major role in the face of emerging new media digital technologies.

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78 Diamond Market, *Heera Mandi* or Red light area, are all euphemism for exclusive area where prostitutes lives and work as *mujra* dancers and sex workers.

## ***The End of Cinema Halls and the Beginning of Mujra Stage Theaters***

During the 1990s, the end of the booming film industry could be easily marked by the transformation of cinema halls into petrol stations, or multi-story plazas for shops and offices in the busiest commercial zones. Those cinema hall owners with close links with the Pakistani film industry<sup>79</sup> converted their cinema halls into stage theaters. Converting the building into a live stage theater helped maintain the expenses of the building. According to the film scriptwriter, Nasir Adeeb, 'In theaters they have income every day, whereas cinema had weekly income'. Remaining few cinemas screen international films mostly, because very few Pakistani films are produced. The conversion of cinema halls into stage theaters developed the culture of mujra dances (please refer to Fig. 2.3), and there was also a change in the audience of Lahore. The present day Pakistani cinema audience's shift towards direct live performance of comedy shows and mujra dances connect them again, after a disjuncture of a few decades with the audiences during British period, which enjoyed live performance theaters during the early period of Indian Cinema (Vasudevan 2010). In the absence of public entertainment, the filmgoers started filling the halls of stage shows, which offered them light entertainment, comedy, and live dance sequences by emerging stage dancers. A new genre of stage mujra dance emerged during the decade of 90's, in which male stage actors increasingly used vulgar and obscene language and female dancers used suggestive gestures that attracted huge audiences. This shift of the audience behavior and space is further seen moving towards watching mujra videos and stage shows onto the TV and computer screens, in the privacy of their homes through cable network, DVDs and Internet, packaging the whole experience into a digital small scale intimate realm. The stage dramas were so popular that, initially VHS copies, and later CDs of those stage shows circulated the market. With the arrival of cable television, mujra dance stage shows reached the domestic sphere. My argument in this section aims create an understanding of the development of

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<sup>79</sup> Nasir Adeeb in his interview in his residence in Lahore in 2010.

mujra stage dance shows as a transitional phase between film and digitized mujra dance.



Fig. 2.3 Mehfil Theater named after Mehfil cinema and Alfalah Theater named after Alfalah cinema. I remember going there with my family in childhood and college days to watch films during the 1970s and '80s.

In the mujra dance stage shows, males could experience the physicality of a dancer from a close distance, sometimes of only a few feet, depending on the cost of the seats in the theater halls. The closeness to the dancer enabled men to see the flesh and body of the dancer. Nevertheless, it simultaneously deprived them of the imaginative fantasies resulting from viewing the dancers/actress on the silver screen in the dark, the 'scopophilia', to use Laura Mulvey's term. The close exposure of flesh and the gestures of the dancer made everyone in the audience believe that the dancer is only gesturing towards him. Men sitting in this stage halls dance to her moves, cheer at her gestures, and record her performance on their mobile phones to keep a personalized directory of their desires. These moments, in the short history of mujra dance practices in Pakistan, mark the increased presence of new media technology in the expression of male sexual desire (please see Fig. 2.4 below). I examine in detail the content of these shows along with a reading of the dance moves, in the next chapter, where I present visible aesthetic links with Punjabi film dances.

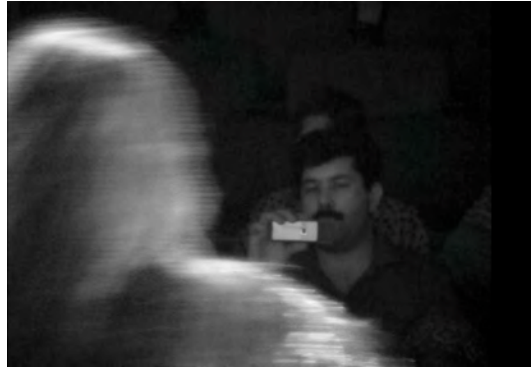


Fig. 2.4 A man is making a video of mujra stage dance on mobile phone in Mehfil theater, Lahore. I took the image in 2006 for BBC film project. Sony Ericson and Nokia launched mobile phones with cameras and were sold in millions in 2005, marking it the beginning of self-recording period through mobile phones.

### ***Development of Mujra Dance Genres***

To understand how the production of mujra videos varies due to its nature and purpose, it is important to first analyze the several types/genres of mujra dance videos present in the contemporary cultural milieu of Pakistan. There are a few genres of mujra dance videos varying in popularity among consumers depending on their age and other preferences. Genre, as defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary is ‘a category of artistic, musical or literary composition by a particular style, form, or content’.<sup>80</sup> Traditionally speaking, categorizing film in a specific genre requires certain rules that bind the various factors together under a particular schematic framework. Stephen Hughes asks significant sociological questions, while ascertaining the categorization of the social hierarchy of the audience through the categorization of film genres. I am particularly interested in using Hughes’ analytical framework approach to read mujra dance video genres. Hughes determines that ‘an analysis of a genre should also include the way genre classifications articulate a sociological relationship between exhibitors and audiences’<sup>81</sup>. I use several terms to categorize the videos as distinctive genres on the basis of how consumers/users define and categorize them. By borrowing from the users’ own categorizations, the sociological

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<sup>80</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/genre>, accessed at 4:00pm on 17<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

<sup>81</sup> Hughes, Stephen. “House full: Silent film genre, exhibition and audiences in south India.” In *Indian Economic & Social History Review*. Vol. 43, issue March (2006): p. 5. Accessed at 2:25 on 16 July 2012 <http://ier.sagepub.com/content/43/1/31>

hierarchies created by the film formalists of a 'high' production is not only subverted, but also fills the void present in the popular new media academic discourse ('users' in the case of the present research and 'audience' in Stephen Hughes' study). New media, due to its user-friendly nature, offers the users of popular mujra dance videos an agency to name, define, and categorize the videos that they are consuming themselves, which is most evident through the study of the content of mujra videos on YouTube. This is particularly relevant for the reading of various CDs and their covers with varying titles, as well as YouTube postings of mujra dances. Sometimes the content is the same in various CDs but they are packaged with a different title to sell it as a new product, morphing time and location. These genres are significant markers of various production modes that are being practiced in the mujra dance videos. The agency of producers, their sexual relationship with the dancers, and the desire to fill the market with expressions of sexual fantasies greatly influence the production of these various types of dance videos.

The following is an explanation of the various mujra dance genres, which were briefly mentioned in the introduction of this dissertation. Professional stage dancers performing *mujras* on stage comprise the first genre in this long list. In these 'hot stage dance mujras', seen in Fig. 2.5a, a mujra dance is part of a stage show with a story and a few more actors. The main actress and dancer performs her item dance and acts in small scenes on the stage usually commenting on men's sexuality. The item song is usually at the end of the drama, with a few other dancers performing before the main dancer's item dance. They use songs in original forms from Punjabi films.

The second genre, seen in Fig. 2.5b, i.e. *nangey* and/or *gandey* (nude and dirty) mujra dances, are often low cost videos of hired female dancers, usually from Heera Mandi (the Red Light district), performing in low-priced motel rooms or private homes. In this type of mujra, the dancer does not necessarily need to be a skilled performer, but her boldness and willingness to reveal her body fully or partially is a good enough criterion for the making of these videos. In the same category are the videos made in private parties and weddings. These range from simple mujra, with women dancing in the courtyard, to big hotel halls

used for the VIP kind of mujra ('Very Important Person' is a term used on CDS and on YouTube under these mujra parties, as is shown in image 2.5c).



Fig. 2.5 Four images showing four different kinds of mujra dances. Image (a) shows mujra in a stage show. Image (b) is the genre that is known as *gandey* or *nangey*, recorded in small rooms, as a private production. The third image titled (c) depicts a private mujra in a VIP style, whereas image (d) is a scene from a *Saturday Night* mujra dance video. Image (e) is a clip from mixed plate genre inserted in between the mujra dances.

The third genre is comprised of video clips captured on mobile phones without the knowledge of the female participant, who is presumably the girlfriend. These are generally known as 'sex scandal videos', even though it is not a guarantee that a whole sex scene will be shown. Many things could qualify

as a 'hot sex scandal': a woman's shy admission of her desire for her boyfriend recorded by hidden camera or hand held mobile with her knowledge; an intimate scene in a car or a room; a long shot from the rooftops of an embracing couple.

I do not analyze the categories of VIP mujras and sex scandal videos in the current thesis because they are not about mujra dance in particular. It was important to mention these because they are sold under the same category of hot/sexy mujra dance videos. The shopkeepers package them along with other dance videos, and they also appear under mujra dance search paths on YouTube, signaling how consumers have created an understanding of the relationship of these videos with those of mujra dance.

The fourth genre, which created much uproar in the print media, is called 'net café scandal videos'. These videos are recorded by webcam without the knowledge and consent of couples sitting in Internet café's booths that are seen to be involved in watching pornographic material or mujra dance. This category of video includes scenes depicting various couples showing diverse age groups, economic backgrounds, and locations. I examine this genre in detail in Chapter Five, which deals with users' and consumer's perceptions. In these video clips, young couples are captured through hidden cameras, and some of these are quite explicit to the extent that a couple is shown partially removing their clothes, and busy in gestures beyond body caressing to the intercourse.

The next genre is called *Mixed plate*. It is comprised of dances from the first category of hot popular mujra dances, with a montage of clips of porn shots from western hardcore pornographic videos inserted in between the dances. These clips are either retrieved illegally from the Internet or are copied from the CDs available in the shops.

The genre *Saturday Night* mujra dances cater to the sophisticated aesthetic of the educated middle class, according to a producer of these videos. In these dance videos contemporary modern dances mimicking Bollywood style are shown (refer to Fig 2.5 d). The dances are initiated by staging a party scene around a swimming pool featuring beautiful, slim, western-clothed females, and

well-built, handsome male dancers. These were originally made to bring some innovation to the existing market of mujra dance. Quite popular from 2004 until 2006, this genre could not sustain its popularity in competition with other new items' constant flow into the market. These types of videos were made primarily to entertain the 'sophisticated' aesthetics of men belonging to the middle and upper classes, and the Pakistani community living in the UK, USA, and Canada<sup>82</sup>. I briefly analyze this genre in the production section along with mujra stage/set designed dances of Nargis and Saima to understand varied aesthetical developments, and to argue that sophisticated mujra dance videos were an attempt by a small group of people in the past to change the course of the aesthetics of mujra dances. This genre also reflects the conscious decision to formally link the dance forms with the ever-present Bollywood in the region. In the section below, I present my arguments by analyzing the production processes, techniques, technologies and male sexual desire and its negotiations, for mujra dance video practices. Due to its peculiar raw nature, technology has enabled and empowered common person to use digital media to fulfill sexual desires in the midst of orthodox religious societal structures and state rules.

### ***The Production of Mujra Dance Videos***

I reiterate that the production of mujra video is a negotiation between desire and business, between female and male desire, and most importantly, negotiations between illicit sexual desire and Muslimness and sense of piety. Never recognized as a legal or formal industry, mujra dance videos thrive due to the immense power of desire. The producers of these videos do not necessarily hold any professional skill or background knowledge of filmmaking. This is a practice that has continued from Punjabi film producers,

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<sup>82</sup> As I was discussing this genre with a senior Pakistani bank official living in London in December 2008, I was surprised by his indulgence and preferences for mujra dance videos, and to learn of the infiltration of these videos through the Internet and other modes of communications. The affluent and educated Pakistani diaspora is heavily enjoying such videos. I came across this gentleman through my art practice connection, as he was interested to know some of my artwork. During the discussion about my research he felt comfortable enough to share his indulgence in sexual entertainment.



who also titled the films with their cast names like *Gujjar*<sup>83</sup>. They came to this industry primarily to turn their illegal money into legal accounts<sup>84</sup>. Therefore, for them, the film's aesthetics and quality of production was primarily according to their own aesthetics and not to make a blockbuster successful film. The presence of such films influenced the producers of mujra video, giving them the confidence to develop video CDs of sophisticated mujras. On the other hand, most of the producers and financiers in the genre of *nangey* and *gandey* mujras come from a distribution background and have shops on Hall Road. The main component of the production of these videos lies primarily in the desire of the producers to fulfill their sexual fantasies even before they start thinking of preparing to make the videos for their customers.

In the following section, I first present the mujra video's genre sophisticated mujra videos and locate its production, then *Saturday Night* mujra videos, which was conceived in response to the popularity of sophisticated mujra videos. I then proceed to present my analyses of a descriptive narrative of the production process, focusing on the producers of *nangey* and *gandey* mujra videos. The explicit and direct nature of *nangey* and *gandey* mujra dance videos emerged through a very open and direct communication that took place between the producers and myself while discussing the production of these videos.

***Sophisticated mujra videos.*** This genre is a direct offshoot of Pakistani/Punjabi film industry, linking the transformation of film into stage theaters. As mentioned earlier, the idea of making staged mujra dance videos was initiated by the same group of financiers/producers who had been involved in the making of numerous low budget Punjabi films.<sup>85</sup> These videos

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<sup>83</sup> Films were titled as, *Gujjar Badmash* (Gujjar goons, gujjar meaning is a pastoral agricultural ethnic group).

<sup>84</sup> Adeeb, Sohail, and a film producer of the 60's era Riaz Gull, shared this information in a discussion with the researcher in 2010 and 2012.

<sup>85</sup> I was told by Altaf Bajwa, the film lyricist; Nasir Adeeb, and other small producers of *Nangey* and *Gandey* mujra videos about the financiers and producers who initiated the proper release of videos of mujra dances of Nargis and Saima and other famous dancers/actresses. Most of them

are professionally made with the help of choreographers, set designers, costume designers, and make-up artists of Pakistani film industry. They have established connections with professional camerapersons, editors, and others. They use proper distributors such as Universal CDs to ensure its wide distribution.

In the beginning of the transformative phase in early 90's, the stage show dances were compiled in a CD format, with simple copy editing skills, and then packaged and launched into the market with a cover design. Later, influenced with the popularity of more sophisticated Bollywood films, the producers started using properly designed stage sets with themes and choreographed dances. The production of these high-cost mujra videos entails much elaborate detailed work (please refer to Fig. 2.6a). The production cost of these videos ranges between as less as ten thousand to as much as three hundred thousand rupees with the main dancer's charges being the highest cost. They employ the set pieces of previous film studios, with stages designed as pastiche copies of famous Bollywood and Punjabi film songs. Producers are only concerned with designing and introducing lavish sets and choreographed dance moves, and are not interested in making a new mujra dance album with new music; instead they continue to feed off Punjabi film's song repository, including Naseebo Lal and sometimes Bollywood songs, without paying much heed to copyright and piracy issues. The professional rivalries between famous dancers are also a factor in improvising and developing various set designs, costumes, and choreography, resulting in increased production costs. Sometimes they all select the same song sung by Naseebo Lal, or her sister Nooran Lal, on the basis of their popularity, which offers the possibility of a wide range of dance moves and set designs on one song. The editing in these videos is done very carefully, with an emphasis on using small techniques and aftereffects that highlight the dancer's best angles and body parts in floating shapes like stars or hearts, that continue to zoom in and zoom out on the screen.

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have shifted their financial support from Punjabi films to mujra videos, which proved more entertaining, quick, and lucrative.

The cost difference between the production of these dance videos and *nangey* and *gandey* mujra videos, which I examine below, reflects the socio-economic background of the producers and the financiers of various genres, who make products for their own sexual desires and then other male consumers. The popularity of these videos has also helps to empower the dancers. For instance, Nargis, the most popular dancer, is now in control of designing her own videos and does not accept private mujra party invitations, except from high profile connections. These videos inspire other dancers in low-cost mujra videos to become famous and be in charge of their own mujra performances and videos.

***Saturday Night mujra videos.*** The other mujra video genre, *Saturday Night* series, was produced in an attempt to cater to the needs of the upper middle educated class and their aesthetics, as was clearly stated by its producers. The choice of songs and models/dancers was very different from the average mujra dance videos; it was primarily popular Indian film and Pakistani pop songs. I have selected this genre for my arguments in this section to indicate a significant point in the short history of mujra videos in Pakistan, when an attempt was made to change the existing trends and standards of dance practices. Its initial popularity was a short-term phenomenon in the larger picture of mujra video practices. It is also noteworthy that this mujra form incorporated male dances, going against the prevailing trend of mujra videos, and its discontinuation is an indicator of the popular male aesthetic, which prefers to see women dancing for the viewer and not relishing themselves with handsome males on screen, reiterating my earlier position when I argued that having a static hero benefited viewers' identification with his fantasies and dancing woman.

The main financier belonged of this video series was closely related to previous generations of Pakistani films financiers. Himself a lawyer, he offered Salman, the producer of the series and his team, his own house consisting of a swimming pool in Defence society, an upscale residential area of Lahore, for a shoot. Upon agreement, Salman and his team, arranged a sound system, hired two well-trained camerapersons and few smart, young

male and female aspiring models. For them the whole idea was 'to have fun and party', and they completely immersed themselves in this venture. They wanted to break free from the aesthetics of typical Punjabi mujra dance videos of Nargis and Saima Khan, which dominated the market. They were not very happy with the aesthetics of the Punjabi mujra dances and wanted to copy Bollywood dance styles and music videos. Salman told me that they were provided with security guards, and informed the local police officials about the shoot beforehand to circumvent any break-in. He further mentioned, 'You can't even imagine how powerful they were, as we were shooting this amongst the police security in Pakistan'.

Salman was an old connection, and helped me make a list of people in the production business that I should meet and interview. He is one of the people I interviewed in 2006 during the making of a short film for BBC. He had worked on a film written by Nasir Adeeb and was waiting for its release. When I approached him again, he asked me to come to a cafe in the basement of a building in a posh location in Lahore. Lounging in a semi-dark upper-class basement café with his friends, he introduced me to then and gesturing at a young girl in her late teens sitting next to him stated chuckling, 'She also wants to become a model. I will help her but then she will have to follow *my* directions.' He talked very openly about her addiction to alcohol in front of her, and stated that she is now so hooked on vodka that if you give her a bottle of it she will do whatever you want her to do. In his interview earlier for the BBC film he told me how they recruited young girls and boys for their *Saturday Night* mujra video, where everyone aspired to reach the hall of fame. Alcohol was supplied for the shoot by the financier. The models were given a small amount of money, around five thousand to seven thousand Rupees each. They were satisfied with this small amount because it offered them an opportunity to be seen in a sophisticated dance series, which promised popularity and fame. The total cost of the video with seven dances was approximately seventy thousand Rupees. The main financier uses this video as an experiment for his personal motives and did not want his name to be used on the video. When Salman completed the first video they took it to Hall

Road for distribution. They had to relinquish the idea of releasing it on their own because they did not want to deal with the market issues of piracy, so they sold the video to a proper distributor. The success of the first video led them to produce five more videos subsequently.

For the *Saturday Night* series, however, having male models along with females in a sensual dance was a very important prerequisite. It challenged the present notions of dance practices. Their idea was to initiate a style, which shows both men and women in a westernized setting intermingling freely, creating a fantasy world where everyone is partying, dancing, smoking, and having free sex. If the female performers in those videos were looking for a better life by becoming more known as model or dancer, the male performers were likewise aspiring to the same goal. When I was interviewing Salman and Ali Sultan, who performed in the video, they were very proud of their body and wanted to expose it as much as possible. After some years when people's interest in the series began to decline, Sultan left the idea of becoming a model and went abroad.

The series didn't succeed, primarily because it was a pastiche copy of Bollywood idealism, and the 'westernized' and 'educated' classes did not need these kinds of videos as they were already enjoying that kind of lifestyle. For many of them, it was a party and not mujra, as someone wrote under this video on YouTube. Some did not believe it was happening in Pakistan, and considered it a piece of Indian propaganda against Pakistani society. Those accounts have never shown any doubt about the presence of other mujra dance videos in Pakistan. It is likely that the aesthetics of more typical videos are more in alignment with the wider preferences of consumers and hence can explain the failure of the *Saturday Night* video series.

***Production of nangey and gandey mujra videos.*** This section of production forms the core of my argument, because it offers an insight into the practices of production and consumption of mujra videos, as well as the sexual desires of the producers of those videos. By looking at the production of these mujra videos, I argue that, male desire is able to assert its agency within the social

moralist structures through the help of the ease provided by new media and digital technology. This fact establishes it as a unique practice in contemporary media studies, especially in the Muslim world and South Asia. In the examination of this genre, I focus on the contextual background of the production process and how male sexual desire enables shopkeepers to become producers of these videos.

I met with Mohammad Sher and Khalid Jutt, producers of *nangey* and *gandey* mujra videos, in a series of interviews. After the first interview with Khalid Jutt, he suggested that I interview another producer who was also one of his friends. I was surprised because this interview was being done not on my own request but due to their interest in the current research. It appears that upon hearing about the previous interviews with shopkeepers and producers, Jutt's friend became interested and volunteered to become part of the discussion. Although the communication took some time to gather momentum, the willingness of the producers of this genre signaled the open and direct approach, which propels the production of these videos. Jutt met me with his friend at the KFC located opposite Hall Road, a place of his choosing, where my assistant Midhat and I had been discussing the research questions and setting up the voice recorder while waiting for their arrival. Recording these interviews in KFC was a problem because of the loud music in the background.

In his sixties, Mohammad Sher, with a smile on his face, was very sober and appeared to be an introvert initially. In the beginning, he took time to open up, but eventually he became more relaxed after I shared some of my interviewing experiences in a lighthearted manner over some food. In my field research, I found sharing problems, issues, and other stories as an ice-breaking catalyst. 'This new businessman', Jutt gestured towards his friend Mohammad Sher, 'started his career in a famous cloth market in Shadman. He had a friend who started this business of adult videos about six years ago. On his persuasion he switched to this side of businesses'. He further added, 'He did not need more money, but entertainment'. To this Mohammad added that he was already very popular among his female clients who used to come from

very posh areas to buy fabrics for their clothes. After a while he had begun to feel bored and wanted to explore other avenues. Therefore, when he saw the extra benefits attached to the mujra dance video business, he shifted towards it.

Khalid Jutt, in his early thirties, expresses a lot through his body gestures and facial expressions while fully engaged in conversation. In the interview he shared, with a chuckle, how he used his facial expressions to his benefit. He claimed that it was impossible for any woman to resist his charms, especially when he raised his right eyebrow and looked intensely into her eyes. Boasting of his masculine attraction and sexual power, he told me that he often bets with his male friends that he would turn his female customers into his girlfriends. I notice how his voice changed into a gentle tone when he answered a phone call. Initially he did not answer the call, so it continued ringing constantly during the interview. On my suggestion that he answer, he responded that it was not important to answer the call because the interview was more important, and continued to reject the call. He told me it was one of his customer-turned-girlfriends. When I told him to answer the call at the end of the interview, he smiled and said, 'Let's see how it goes'. When he called his friend, he completely transformed into a sweet-talking lover but kept saying *nahi* (no, no) during the conversation. After the phone he told me that she wanted to meet him but he was resisting her demand. He described his actions as necessary maneuverings i.e. seeming busy and a difficult hook, in order to keep the flame alive. He told her that at the moment he was sitting with a scholar from London who was researching the videos they produce. He had previously told me that after the interview he would be going to the scheduled shoot of some mujra dance videos with his friends, but he told the woman on the phone that he was busy until later in the night. He also made a few calls during our conversation to organize the venue for a proposed shoot for their new mujra video. He acknowledged that he enjoys it when his girlfriends bestow favors on him, which include car rides and dinners at fancy restaurants. While showing me a long contact list of his female clients-turned-girlfriends he said that handling this girlfriend would not be a

problem. His argument was that these customers were basically not happy with their husbands and therefore could not resist him for their sexual and emotional satisfaction. Seeing him in conversation with his girlfriend and the casualness in organizing last minute perquisites for a mujra shoot, such alcohol and selecting girls from the list provided explained to me how the production of nangey and gandey mujra dance videos are executed. The sexual desire of the producers is central to the formation and appearance of these dances on the digital medium.

While looking at the vast collection of mujra dances that I acquired from different shops, it was evident that only the known stage dancers were using their exquisite and sensuous dance skills to catch the attention of the audiences. In the rest of the videos, on the other hand, the dancers are shown performing in a very amateur and raw manner by making crude gestures (please refer to the image Fig 2.5 b). The distributors-turned-producers of mujra dance hire professional sex workers to dance in their videos. This is done sometimes so crudely that one often sees in the video clip a dancer gesturing at the cameraperson to ask if she is doing the dance correctly. These crude clips are not edited by a skilled editor, therefore leaving many traces of the video-making process in the final product. Upon hiring, the dancers are informed clearly that they are to give shots of ‘sucking, fucking, and dancing in a sexually explicit manner’, as Khalid Jutt told me. It is pertinent to note that while Jutt was describing the production process, he used the English terms when talking about sexual organs, actions and sex. English brings about a certain respectable distance when talking about sexuality in Pakistan among mixed gatherings. Punjabi words describing sex or sexual organs are now used mostly in the wider abusive context, especially among all male gatherings.

According to Jutt, ‘It is very important to make them drunk so they get rid of inhibitions if they have any’. He chuckled and added, ‘Then they do whatever is asked of them’. He further explained why the dancers were comfortable in exposing their bodies in front of the camera by stating that: ‘Since they are used to exposing themselves in front of many men, they find it



easy to dance in nude, sometimes with only a bra on'. But that still partially answered my question, because men are also sometimes participating in these clips. Further, as I argue in the next chapter, after examining content of the videos, men appear to be more hesitant in front of the camera exposing their bodies. For those dancers who are new to the business and are not very comfortable in exposing themselves in front of the camera, they are sometimes offered a thousand Rupees extra and are forced to follow producers' instructions. After the shoot, the production team, normally consisting of about four to five men, is ready to celebrate their excitement. After the dances finish, the environment is loaded with sexual desire, heightening the expectations of all the members of the team of prospective sex with the dancers. This post shoot sex is negotiated with the dancers and/or their agents before they organize a shoot. They also make their own footage of sex with the dancer through mobile phones and other handy cams even though that footage is not used in these videos. For them this footage is considered a private record of their adventure and to be shared among friends.

Upon examining the question of males representing themselves in these accounts of desire, Jutt told me about a producer named Suhail, who has now left this business of producing mujra videos. He made about twenty mujra videos that depicted him as a performer with female dancers. 'He enjoyed seeing himself in those videos, but usually we don't like to show ourselves in the videos', stated Jutt. A discussion with him further revealed that this practice was not very common among the producers' community. They are scared of showing their faces in public for the sake of their business, and are not comfortable seeing themselves in mass circulation. To see one's own body being discussed by other males is not their idea of sexual desires. During the course of film production, people are careful not to show the male face very clearly. In one instance, in the Muridke<sup>86</sup> sex scandal, a male face was clearly visible which led to his arrest after much hue and cry was created

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<sup>86</sup> This scandal became famous after the name of the city, Muridke. This is a typical way to name the sex scandal videos, after their town of origin.

by the girl's family and the media. Jutt told me that men are aware of the dire consequences and therefore fear the notoriety. This awareness comes with knowledge acquired due to being the producers, distributors, and sellers of these videos. The acquiring of a sex scandal from a male producer and editing at the time of production empowers the producers with enough understanding of the power of the image and how it can have drastic affects on their lives.

As stated earlier, alcohol serves a very important role in the making of these videos. For the producers, it heightens their desire, while for the dancers; it serves to lower their inhibitions. The environment of the production site is usually 'abusive' to use Jutt's phrase, with every person drunk before the shooting and feeling free to express themselves. Even though the dancers consent to be part of this production they are usually slapped to get them to perform in a specific manner. I was told that, in the mind of female dancers, when they agree to such videos with the producers, they do so with the hope that it is some kind of platform which leads to fame and money. The dancer does not necessarily have to be a prostitute. Primarily, these girls are interested in becoming models. 'They all want to reach the status of Saima and Nargis<sup>87</sup> and do not realize that it was their luck or something else that made them very famous and hot entities', said Jutt.

I was asked by Khalid Jutt to come along to a shoot to see and record how the process takes place. After some deliberation, I refrained from going with them to one of the houses in Johar Town, a middle-class residential area. I had good reasons for not going there. I did not feel like subjecting myself, being a Pakistani female researcher, to the abusive atmosphere of the production and also felt that the shoot would not take place in its real essence in front of me, that the abusive and sex part would be possibly censored due to my presence and so it would not be real participatory observation.

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<sup>87</sup> Saima Khan and Nargis are two big names in the stage mujra shows.

Setting up for a shoot. Before setting for the video recording, no one knows about the shoot except those who organize it, and the few people who are going along. Sher Mohammad told me that he and his friends make these videos when they decide to entertain themselves. Usually when they decide to go for a shoot, they have two cameras. One of the friends becomes the cameraperson, and is usually a little bit more informed about its handling and mechanics. The other camera is set up to film from a fixed position. The static and the moving image are later used to create dynamic close-ups employing several editing tools available in Premiere software. They explained the production in a very simple way, 'whenever we feel like having a party, we call them and arrange for a room. We usually take one or two cameras, and shoot the video.' In these party mujra videos, planning, and preparation in designing the narrative, dresses, lighting, or atmospheric elements are not considered of much importance. I wondered if they employed any selection criteria for hiring a dancing girl, in terms of beauty, face, body, and age, and if they do, is it the audience's desires or their own desires that dictates the hiring? The answer was quite a practical one: 'Whomever we get hold of at the time' - accept and make do with whoever is available at the time. The producers keep close contacts with these girls. According to Jutt, girls from Sindh province are considered to be the most beautiful because of their delicate features. The sex scandal videos have about eighty percent girls from Sindh, whereas a mujra dance video is comprised of girls mainly from Punjab, as this is a typical Punjabi dance style and Punjabi girls are considered to be very 'hot and sexy'.

If they decide on an indoor shooting, the space for recording mujra dance is moderately small in size. The space is usually someone's house, used mainly for these shoots, which they have hired. The interior spaces of these houses serve as the center stage in mujra dance videos. They also show contemporary aesthetics in their use of materials and furniture which are commonly found in the interiors of Lahore's middle-class houses. Usually they take one of the rooms with some basic furniture such as a bed, some chairs, a table, and/or a sofa set. The dancer is given the empty space on the

carpet in between furniture pieces. Depending on the quality of the space the producer managed to hire, the space used as a dance stage is sometimes around four feet where the dancer/s are squeezed in between the cupboard and the bed, and sometimes it consists of a big living room area where the dancer moves from one point to the other. If the dancer is good she incorporates the bed or other furniture pieces as a prop in her dance moves. The bed is usually a pastiche of an elaborate art deco or kitsch design, with colorful painted patterns on its woodcarving. In some instances, the dancer is shown in different clips dancing in different parts of the same house, including the dining room, where the dining table is used in alluring dance moves. Sometimes the room is so small that the people who are watching the dance are visible in the camera frame. Not bothered about being a distraction, the men are actually seen talking, laughing, and even giving directions to the dancer.

The recording of the mujra videos commences with kissing. However, in the final released version, kissing scenes are usually deleted because they are considered unimportant and irrelevant. The kissing reflects a particular kind of intimacy between the sexual partners, which is dangerous for luring men who are watching these films. It is equivalent to watching a duet dance song in which the woman dancer is shown enjoying her sexuality with another male in the film frame. A female dancing naked in the absence of males, and/or with males but with the camera holding her gaze oblivious to the male presence, allows the viewers in their fantasy to devour the female dancer in the video. The editing is not done carefully to keep track of the dance sequences. Sometimes, during the later stage of the dance when the dancer has shed her clothes, clips of previous shots appear with the dancer fully clothed. The producer considers these haphazard jump-cuts a good way of inciting sexual desire. The sex is more important. Watching sex videos only makes the woman a fetishized object, which reduces her being to sex only, and therefore is widely acceptable in the market. Jutt, while articulating the requirement of porn scenes in mujra videos, denied that they made any effort in finding dancers according to these demands. The idea of professional male

models for these videos is never entertained because 'they are just friends or some acquaintances interested in experiencing the sex and to have some fun'. As I mentioned earlier, the sex scenes with the dancers are not included in the final release of the films and in the 'sex scandal videos the male face is usually hidden', according to Jutt. Their aversion to showing male faces or bodies in these mujra dances is diametrically opposite to the approach of Salman and Ali, the producers of the *Saturday Night* mujra series, who tried to change the prevalent trend. It also reveals the focus of their pleasure and professional practices. *Saturday Night* was a venture designed to open further avenues for dancers both male and female, whereas *nangey* and *gandey* mujra videos' production caters to male sexual desire and fantasies.

The cost of production. The overall cost of the mujra videos done by Khalid Jutt ranges from 10,000 to 15,000 Rupees, which mainly covers the dancer's cost. The camera equipment is either the property of the producer or some of the friends who also participate in this production venture. The higher quality *mujra* dance videos require more investment in the production because of their meticulously detailed dance sequences. As discussed earlier, the producers of higher quality videos, are usually quite rich people who have other businesses with some background in the film industry. They like to invest in this genre for entertainment and to continue to create links with dancers. However, popular mujra videos of unknown dancers, recorded in a simple manner and showing mostly the nude dances, are produced by the shop-owners at Hall Road. In the other genres of private mujras and sex scandals, several common people who participate in the parties or are Internet café owners record the videos and sell them at a very low price to these shopkeepers. Many students also sell their own videos for five hundred rupees to make some extra pocket money. These shopkeepers, who are also producers of other genres, use the videos' contents for mass distribution, and also insert clips from them into their own production as a montage.

Selection of cover design. I met Khalid Jutt a week after the shoot of their new mujra CD. I inquired about the stage of video, wondering if it was finalized and if I could see the final product. He told me that the dance video was ready

but that it was still undergoing the selection stage of the songs and the title. They had not yet decided on their selection of songs from Punjabi films or Bollywood. That they'd already completed production but had yet to make these decisions shows their casual attitude towards the making of these videos. They also needed to design the cover, while the printing of the wrappers and covers would be done at Hall Road. Some of the songs are old and some are new, and even though the video is a joint production between Khalid Jutt and Mohammad Sher there is no name of the production house, which signals their preference for anonymity. As I argued earlier, the production of mujra videos is mainly initiated due to a desire to cater to the sexual entertainment of the producers/distributors. That makes other aspects of production, such as selecting songs, deciding on a title for the video, and designing the CD cover less important. Also, due to the widespread practice of mixing and copying songs from other Punjabi films and videos, and the technological ease with which songs and images are transferred from one data to another, these producers consider post production work quite an easy task. They simply follow the existing editing trends for creating after effects to enhance the overall video design.

In most of the videos, the images shown on the covers do not necessarily depict the person performing in the videos. To design the covers of CDs the editors use the vast archive and database of porn and mujra videos present in most of the shops. The cover design tends to show sensational postures juxtaposed against each other. The body parts are sometimes color treated and highlighted for greater excitement. The titles are also repeated from existing popular CDs. The cut, pasted, and edited images show the organic sensibility of the informal piracy networks. That the images presented on the cover may not correspond to the person inside the CD is a normal practice, and is ignored by many. But the cover designs of famous dancers such as Nargis, Deedar, and Saima do not follow this practice. They are selected from the vast collection of the images present in the workshops/shops of the distributors and producers. The titles are selected sometimes as copies of already existing ones, or sometimes a popular phrase

from English/Urdu/Punjabi or Bollywood is picked as a title. Fig. 2.7 shows the title of the video CD *Hoor Choopo* (to suck more) on the cover on the right side of the image. This is a popular Punjabi expression used in common everyday innuendos, without a specific sexual connotation. Normally it is used when someone has a sincere motive and is attempting to help someone else, who in return discredits the person by questioning his sincerity. The expression is used to state that, because the person was so desperate to offer help, they now bear the consequences of their offer. The twist of the word, from sucking sugar cane bits to the sexual meaning of sucking, is typical of the titles of these videos.



Fig. 2.7 these are two CD covers. The left side shows the cover of a mixed-plate genre, with an emphasis of a white western female, tantalizing many desires for a more explicit view inside the video. The right side cover shows a typical mujra video of *nangey* and *gandey* genre.

In the end, I reiterate my argument that this chapter addresses the notion of masculinity, sexual desire and its complexity, and describes the tools of production through which male desire is able to assert its agency of fulfilling sexual desire in the face of orthodox religious ideology. The descriptive analysis was employed to articulate the presence of several kinds of mujra videos at Hall Road, as an evidence of the magnitude of these techniques and tools of male agency for its sexual desire. Simultaneously, I

argued in this chapter, by locating historical perspective of the transformation of the film industry that helped convert the cinema halls into theaters, that the cycle of employing courtesan/nautch girls and prostitutes, which started from first employing them in theater during British times, then these dancing girls moved to cinema after the decade of 70's in Pakistani cinema. Simultaneously, cinema halls shifted to theater performances, due to many reasons articulated above, which brought back the tradition of live mujra dances in present times. This cycle marks a unique development circle in cinema studies exclusive to Pakistan due to many socio-political and orthodox religious ideologies. The production of mujra video using digital technologies signals the ever-changing sphere of mujra dance practice, that is the shift of the performative space from the *kothas* of courtesans to film, stage, and now the digital format. Digital technologies are tools to enable laypeople to represent and perform their sexual expression. The straightforwardness of the technology of making, mixing, copying, and selling these videos generates parallel economic structures which are illegal and informal, but which are very much visible and active in the cultural environment of contemporary Pakistani society. In the next chapter, I critically review the complexities of male desire by analyzing the visual and lyrical content of these videos. These critical analyses further highlight the negotiations of male desire with ideological and socio-religious values, and question the notion of desire and how it is viewed, constructed, and expressed through the practices of mujra dance videos.





## Chapter 3

## Reading Content of Mujra Dance Videos and the Complexities of Masculine Desire

This chapter examines the visual and lyrical content of the dances and songs of mujra dance videos, and argues that male sexuality is at its most complex when examined in relationship to female sexual desire and attempts to control it. In the previous chapter, I articulated the term *mazaa* for sexual desire, which has been employed successfully as a tool and technique of negotiating the desire. The interlocutors explained their notion of pleasure encapsulated within *mazaa*, reminiscent of sexual fantasies, floating through the fluid spaces of networks of piracy, production processes, ideologies of state and religious moralists, corrupt systems, and female desire. These negotiations for the fulfillment of sexual desire are manifested in the fantasy of a sexually powerful women, who poses a challenge to male sexuality in multiple forms, and thus becomes the contested site of control and power over the fantasized image of a sexually robust female in a public space. In this chapter, I investigate that these narratives of desire are written and produced by males, while female singers and dancers perform these scripted fantasies. Through the visual and lyrical reading of content in several genres; mujra dance stage shows, sophisticated mujra dances packaged in a CD format, and *nangey* and *gandey* mujras, the complexity of male desire and its negotiations with social and religious ideology, and its negotiations with binary of public and private is analyzed. I construct my argument around questions; how do they understand their perceive male desire and sexuality? Do they find it complex, and also to what extent their created fantasies cater to male desire, as the female is often shown mocking or posing challenge to male sexuality on stage shows followed by mujra dances. Desiring such powerful women is diametrically opposite to the desire to control female sexuality in private domain. This binary of public and private is explored through the interviews I conducted with writers and lyricists of films and songs. The analysis of their interviews reveals the complex relationship of male desire manifested through the making of the silent, emotionless, angry male hero of Punjabi films, which helped develop the present form of mujra dances in Punjabi cinema. In continuation of the tradition of the silent male hero and the powerful female heroine, these dance moves, then, continue to serve male desire on videos of mujra dance stage shows, as well as other popular mujra videos. In this way, I argue, the present-day digital video CD of mujra dances are directly transformed from the aesthetics and forms of dance tradition first developed in cinema and then transformed on live stage shows.

The previous chapter examined how socio-political factors created a cultural vacuum, resulting in the demise of the Pakistani film industry, which in turn gave birth to other forms of performative practices such as live comedy stage shows, which incorporated live mujra dances as an integral component. I explained how these live performances were later transformed into video CDs due to the increasing presence of digital technologies and the content articulated the mode and apparatus of production of the mujra dances, which I reviewed in the last chapter.

Through that articulation, I present the interrelationship of production and content, an agency of the videos' producers for fulfillment of their sexual desire. The complexity of male desire revealed through an analysis of the content is directly linked with the main argument of the thesis; new media and its ever-increasing presence and use in the Pakistani cultural milieu, is a phenomenon which incorporate production of mujra dance videos as live performances and male desire.

In the beginning of this chapter I analyze how the stage shows are serving popular notions of subverting those who are powerful in the social structures, along with offering a spectrum of sexual fantasies. Although these comedy stage plays are subversive in nature, it is significant to note that these stage shows and mujra dance videos form a link with the aesthetics, songs, and dances of Punjabi films in a period of oppression largely understood as a vacuum in the Pakistani film industry. Specifically through this chapter, and generally through the dissertation, I argue through this chapter that rather than reading this period as cultural vacuum in the Pakistani film industry, new media and mujra dance videos are the productive and logical outcome of the tradition of dance practices, a hallmark of the film industry before the partition of India, which express tremendous energetic sexual expressions, defy state's oppressive ideology, and subvert social and moralist ideals.

### ***Mujra Dance in Stage plays***

This section investigates the thematic and visual links of stage shows with the films of the 1980s and present-day mujra video CDs. I establish these links as a thread that has joined the tradition of mujra dance through many decades, under politically hostile environments, finally transforming the performative practices into a digitized format. Before I examine the various visual elements of the mujra dance form that takes place live on stage daily in front of hundreds of people, it is important to provide a brief background of stage play performances in Lahore. While the eleven-year dictatorial and orthodox military regime of Zia-ul-Haq resulted in a vacuum in the realm of entertainment and cultural life in Pakistan, live stage play was able to use the tools and techniques of deriving *mazaa* even through rigid censorship controls. Although the performers have borne the brunt of the state by constantly facing bans and punishments from the police<sup>88</sup>, these

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<sup>88</sup> Nargis, a renowned stage mujra dancer, was targeted and physically abused by the police when she threatened to publically disclose the names of police officers for their hypocrisy. She claimed that police officers visit her to see her mujra dances and for other 'favours', but in front of the media condemn her performance and vow to eradicate all these 'ills' from society. Recently on a Geo TV interview she was asked to comment on

plays continue to assert their agency by commenting on the dichotomist practices of government officials, social morality, and male sexual desires. Thus, the stage plays being the most widely and regularly attended entertainment in Lahore become the site of critique of governmentality and power, which is direct, raw, and crude in form, layered within sexually-induced dialogues with double meanings.

In the last chapter I examined the rapid rise of stage dance performances as a result of the gradual decline of the Pakistani film industry. It is also pertinent here to recognize the simultaneous influence of television plays' on the development of comedy of stage play. From the late 1970s to end of the 1980s, Pakistan Television (PTV) was closely monitored and strict moral and political codes were implemented by the censor-board of Zia-ul-Haq's military government. However, at the same time, the military government strategically supported PTV plays that addressed the corruption and failure of state institutions like the police, the taxation office, and customs control. By allowing comedy series like *Fifty/Fifty* on PTV's platform, the military government managed to redirect people's repressed political feelings against the military rule towards the failure of civil governing institutions. The stage play has continued the legacy of the film industry in its formal aspects and continues to comment on social and political issues by taking on the lead of PTV comedy shows. Gradually, these comedy stage shows drifted from hiring PTV's popular comedy actresses to female dancers from *Heera Mandi*, and became overtly sexual entertainment shows (Pamment 2012, see as well as Nasir Adeeb's detailed discussion about the decline of Pakistani Cinema). John Rambo (a stage name), who started his career from TV play as a comedian, became a popular dancer on films and stage, but now has been reduced to playing small comedy roles on stage shows. Rambo responded to his changing roles with much chagrin as, 'stage plays are serving to male audiences only' (2006). This statement is

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this episode, and she replied with a smile that she had forgotten about it and moved on with her life, and would therefore like not to comment again. This is also analysed in Claire Pamment's paper, *A Split Discourse: Body Politics in Pakistan's Popular Punjabi Theatre*, in which she discusses how these attacks on her went 'unnoticed by human and women rights activists'.

reminiscent of the stage play as a site of fulfillment of sexual fantasies where the comedian's role is curtailed to highlight the female dancer's role in the play.

The stage comedies use the Punjabi vernacular instead of the national language, Urdu, which enables them to use a richer and wider vocabulary, and a freer form of expression. Although some very popular stage plays were initially written in Urdu, the Punjabi language eventually became the main expression of these stage plays. Using the popular vernacular also helped people to identify more closely and deeply with the plays' politics because a large proportion of the population speaks Punjabi, in comparison to only eight percent of the population who speak Urdu (Pamment 2012, 116). Claire Pamment argues that the use of popular Punjabi expressions helped not only to dismantle the state authority but also gave voice to marginalized groups like *Kanjar* and *Mirasi*<sup>89</sup>, prostitutes, servants, dwarfs, and other oppressed groups. Pamment notes that these stage shows were initially about caricaturing the affluent and influential, including feudal lords, the police, civil government officials, politicians, and housewives (2012, 115).

To the above list presented by Pamment, I would further add educated and economically empowered women, who are usually ridiculed in both films and stage plays. Housewives are portrayed as sexually frustrated women that serve an important element in the script of the play. The divide of educated, economically empowered women and marginalized prostitutes, and the binary of low and high, is prevalent not only in the public and state discourse but also in the little scholarship to be found on performance in Pakistan. I will present a brief analysis of contemporary scholarship on body politics in Pakistan, which ignores indigenous singers like Naseebo Lal and other female actresses and dancers. Fawzia Afzal Khan exposes the void present in scholarship regarding female performers in music and dance in the performative public space. She points at Ahmed Nauman (an engineer who

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<sup>89</sup> Casts known for singing and dancing, who are considered 'low' in the general social hierarchy, see also Fauzia Saeed 2002.

runs a radio show featuring contemporary and traditional Pakistani music in the Twin Cities, Minnesota), as a researcher who,

cast an eye at the effects of a repressive society on the development or lack thereof of musical performance in Pakistan, particularly as regards the contributions of female artists, who nevertheless challenge the status quo in different ways (2010, 23).

While discussing the songs of other female singers who sing the poetry of male poets about alcohol, Nauman regards the singer Munni Begum with respect since she is courageous enough to sing poetry about a prohibited practice i.e. alcohol. He further celebrates the 'feminine voice' of a younger female singer, Naghmana Jaffery, who he describes as a 'leopard-skin-print shirt and a pair of pants' singing her desires, for example, 'I am proud...no one will be able to capture this Laila'. He then includes Fawzia Afzal Khan in his list of the few women who challenge the norms, both by making music videos and by publicly singing the revolutionary poetry of renowned poets. In his 'research on the history of popular musical performances' (Khan, 2010, 23), the gap between indigenous organic expressions of musical performances and 'high' performances is obvious. The practices of live performances on Punjabi stage are clearly ignored in major accounts, with the exception of Pammet's work, whereas Fawzia's less popular and less visible performance on the media is given much more importance.

This non-recognition of the struggle of indigenous performances during the most tumultuous times is highlighted only to claim the presence of a void in public performances in Pakistan. In her reading of performative public intervention, Khan notes the absence of a feminine, if not feminist, voice, but falls into the trap of celebrating a voice that is a continuation of a western and liberal aesthetic, one that replicates colonial performances (see Pamment, 2012)<sup>90</sup>. I argue that, although, the voices of the females portrayed in these songs and stage plays are written by men, they are performed by

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<sup>90</sup> Pamment argues that these performances are considered 'low' and do not attract the attention of the 'liberal' and 'educated' classes because they use the Punjabi language.

females in public spaces, making them indirect but active agents of society. These performances, which I analyze in detail in the following section, enable female performers to negotiate their position in society by constantly challenging with humor, taunts, and sexual body moves. These indirect agents that survive the brunt of regulatory authority continue to ‘challenge the status quo’.



Fig. 3.1 The above screen shots are of Nargis, who is popularly known as a good mujra dancer.

***Punjabi stage play*** In this section, I examine the aesthetics of stage play to demonstrate its influence in shaping the visual and lyrical content of mujra dance videos in its present form and to establish stage plays as a transitional media between Pakistani film and mujra dance videos – from analogue to digital and new media.

The stage plays are usually about two and half hours long, and they are performed in multiple theatres of various sizes. Unlike cinema hoardings, the facades of theaters depict only the faces of the performers with their



names written underneath (please refer to Fig. 1.2 in the first chapter). The formulaic script is followed casually, with more emphasis on dialogues, delivered impromptu using the vast Punjabi vernacular and current prevailing expressions, which underlie social and political issues. In many cases, they typically represent a critique of influential and affluent characters by the marginalized people of society like witty domestic servants. The present form of stage show includes four to five dance items, and the most lascivious dance (the item number) is usually performed at the end to keep the audience glued to their seats. Once the last dance finished, the audience takes it as a hint and starts leaving the theater without any formal ending of the play.

The sexually powerful *mujra* dance centers on ridiculing male impotency. The male Punjabi comedian, by using his witty dialogues, creates a narrative where female character's strong sexuality is presented as demanding and unsatisfied by her husband. The rest of the male cast fights for her favor, using Punjabi insinuations to express their desire for sex with the dancer. It is significant for my analysis to discuss Richard Dyer's study of comedy, in which males are shown more comfortable in comic medium than in any other media representation. It is very common for males to make fun of their own sexuality by pointing towards their flimsy, squishy, and flaccid penises, which cannot fulfill the expected goals for men. He argues that it continues to play with the notion of the penis as apart from the man 'leading him into mischief, making a fool out of him' (1993, 115). It validates the idea of male sexuality as essentially asocial, outside of social construction and responsibility.



Figure. 3.2 A stage show with the famous stage actors Saima Khan, Nasir Chinioti, and Iftakhar Thakur. The comedy is about how to hold a gun straight with the right body posture.

A parallel between Dyer's study and Pakistani theatre is very appropriate. As a standard formula, the theater features four to five seductive female dances, whereas male characters are constantly fooling around, and are reduced to 'mere entertainment' as stated earlier by John Rambo<sup>91</sup>. The dialogue in Pakistani plays explicitly expresses male anxieties around sexualities. Usually in the narrative of the play, male actors do not meet the expectations of a sexually potent pursuer. They are shown to demonstrate their sexual energy by continuous desire propelled by the mere sight of these female dancers/characters. To use Dyer's words, they are 'following desires elicited by their penises'. Comedies in the western media as well as in the Pakistani context may undermine men through ridiculing their sexuality, but it always ends up asserting it. Fig. 3.2 depicts the stage dancer and actress Saima Khan telling two men how to hold a gun straight. The dialogues point at the right position for holding the gun, how to aim the target, and most importantly how to keep the body posture erect while aiming. Men pass the gun from one actor to another, unable to hold it properly, while constantly commenting on the sexual heat emanating from the actress' body which makes them lose their focus. These kinds of suggestive dialogues are very popular on stage shows, where men are able to release their anxieties regarding sexual performance. These simultaneous expressions of desiring a sexually powerful woman and being ridiculed sexually in a public place are negotiated only with a sexually powerful women belonging to the public domain.

To understand the deeper complexities present within these comedy stage plays, it is pertinent to analyze a typical popular stage play. The complexities present within male desire, which are celebrated through the sexually powerful and expressive characters of the mujra dancers in these performances, set the context of the mujra dance moves. The play, *Mirch Masala*<sup>92</sup> (hot and spicy), is presented by Fakhar Sharif and Shahid Mehmood,

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<sup>91</sup> John Rambo in an interview in Lahore in 2006, while I was conducting research for a BBC film project. He uses this nickname because he resembles, in physical appearance, the character Rambo played by Sylvester Stallone in the Hollywood film *Rocky*.

<sup>92</sup> *Mirch Masala*. On YouTube, Stage show, retrieved: January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2013

produced by Arshad Chaudhry, and released by the Times Classic Entertainment distribution center located in Dar-ul-Rehmat Plaza, Hall Road. The play is about the household of an elderly widowed feudal lord called Chaudhry (a big land owner), who lives with his married son and daughter. The only complexity in the storyline is the huge number of relatives living in this household, which is also a commentary on the complex network of family relations in Pakistani society. Chaudhry's daughter-in-law, played by the dancer Deedar, is shown as a woman who loves to dance, against her husband's wishes. Deedar's mother lives in the same household, and her son has been engaged to Chaudhry's daughter, though he has never seen his fiancé. The characters in the play do not have individual names but are called by their cast, profession, or relation, with the exception of Deedar's brother who is called Mooda, which is a popular Punjabi short form for the name Mehmood. In Punjabi the word also means upside down and is aptly used in the play to refer to his preferred sexual position and homosexuality.

The stage set depicting a living room of Chaudhry's house uses simple decoration. The two black- and grey-striped sofas face the audience in a wide semicircular, with extra chairs at the back with a bookshelf and one telephone set. In the middle is a staircase leading inside the house. The walls are painted blue, red, and yellow, adorned with big posters, and the floor has a red carpet. The entry of the characters is through the four doorways covered with curtains, presumably three rooms, and the house's main entrance.

The play starts with a scene of Chaudhry and his servant both trying to seduce the maid. She complains to Deedar's elderly mother, who then calls the police to report the matter. The telephone conversation with the police officer is loaded with sexual connotations vis-à-vis the officer and the sexuality of the elderly woman; the dialogue ridicules the successful tabling of bill protecting women against harassment<sup>93</sup>. On the other hand,

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=awlHjG1nbR8>.

<sup>93</sup> The Protection Against Harassment of Women at Workplace Bill, 2010, was passed in March 2010 by President Asif Ali Zardari. That makes it timely point in the story line of the drama.

Chaudhry's son and his wife (Deedar) are shown fighting over Deedar's desire to dance. In their physical fight he beats her up from behind with a long brown rubber pipe, implicating a phallic object along with suggestive dialogues and body actions. She then calls her brother to revenge her dishonor. Her brother enters the stage, and starts hitting the husband with the same rubber pipe i.e. the phallic object. Then Deedar and her husband leave the room and Chaudhry's daughter enters and begins to talk to Deedar's brother. Soon Chaudhry enters and upon seeing Deedar's brother talking to his daughter, starts fighting him with the same rubber pipe. After a very long scene full of dialogues and laughter, the mother enters and tells her son to marry his fiancé and take revenge for the outrageous attitude of Chaudhry's son to his sister. Revenge, in the form of sexual intercourse is discussed, to which he happily agrees. The fiancé is shown to be excited by this turn of events, and then eagerly begins to prepare for the wedding. However, the would-be groom calls after her not to be 'too prepared' as he may not be able to (sexually) 'prepare' himself.

The police officer, SHO<sup>94</sup>, enters the stage, wanting a favor from Chaudhry. After some time, Chaudhry helplessly agrees, but only after commenting on the hyper sexuality of the police officer's wife. The SHO is also accompanied by a dwarf, Teddy (meaning 'dwarf' in Punjabi), who is then ridiculed over his height by Chaudhry, who enquires, 'since your head only reaches the navel of a normal man, so what do you hold if you wants to hold a criminal's collar?' The police officer seemingly enraged, leaves the stage but not without taking a bribe from Chaudhry.

The next scene is about the wedding, in which an exchange of sexual jokes and comments highlight the performative anxiety of males by ridiculing the groom's incompetent sexuality in comparison his bride, who is portrayed as an 'experienced' and 'learned' woman, and whose hyper sexuality is evident through her excitement. After the wedding Saima Khan<sup>95</sup> enters as a

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<sup>94</sup> Station Head Officer

<sup>95</sup> Saima Khan is famous mujra dancer who played the role of a private TV director in this play.

director of a new private channel, '*Ungle*' (literally meaning finger). She wants to interview the bridegroom about his feelings. The dialogue exchange between the director, cameraperson, and the family, as well as the presence of a video camera on the stage, is used intelligently to comment on the editing style of mujra CDs, the close up shots of Saima Khan's dance video in reality, and the overall role of media in affecting the society sexually. The play ends with a scene of two men taking their wives out to watch a Punjabi Film, *Maula Jutt*. When they arrive home, they comment on the hero who is a static log-like figure, and then Deedar starts to dance. When the dance finishes, people start to leave and the play ends at this point.

***Sexuality in stage plays.*** In this section I examine the sexually loaded dialogues and acts that comment on the complex socio-political environment of Pakistan. No one from authority is spared in their commentary including the: police and their inefficiency, acceptance of bribery, and nepotism; the complex familial relationships; and the sexual fantasies of Chaudhry's household. The use of puns constantly, weaved in the sexually explicit dialogues, are empowering for the performers, who belong to the lowest strata of society, and allows them voice their grievances by attacking the honour of influential people (Pamment 2010, 116). These comedies are the apparatuses of an empowering agency for a short-lived moment on stage while unraveling the tales of dichotomous sexual practices. This agency is reflected through actors commenting on actual professional and personal lives of each other. The mujra dancers remain mujra dancers, whose famous dance CDs are commented on in between the dialogues, while the audience's desires to look closely and live the dancers, triggered by mujra dance CDs, is knitted in the dialogues. The sexuality of these dancers is celebrated even at the cost of the performance, as is manifested by the male actor caressing the hand of the actress playing his sister's role. He publically claims his manhood by sharing that he does not believe in the role of brother given by the director, but rather enjoys holding this dancer's hand at this moment. His comment suddenly removes the dancer away from the character she was playing and makes her the desired female. By identifying with the male actor,

the desire is shared amongst all the males, both the actor and the audience. Male desire is displayed, despite whatever storyline is given by the director. This is in defiance of the general rule of performance, which keeps characterization as close to a reality as possible during the performance. By breaking away from this structure, the actors execute their agency to express male sexual desire.

When Saima Kahn enters the stage she asks if she could have something cold to drink, like 'banana juice', to which Chaudhry's son mutters, 'and here I am cold'. The reference to food and fruits is appropriately and extensively used in the dialogues. An oversize orange is used to praise the maid's breast size in one scene, which is immediately followed by the servant bringing a small rotten banana for the cameraperson, a direct reference to the penis. In another dialogue, drinking milk is used to refer to the sucking of the maid's breasts; in another, the son talks about his father's semen as gravy that he will offer to his brother-in-law as an insult. Male sexuality is constantly challenged in the jokes and the wit of the performers. The female characters never lose a chance to remind males about their inability to perform sexually every time the male is boasting of his sexual desire. Similarly, other male characters also challenge males by using fruit and the rubber pipe as phallic objects. Both males and females constantly assert their agency to negotiate, express, and control sexual desire. They further use tools of asserting their agency in the shape of props and food items in an overtly loaded exchange of sexual comments about the nature, shape, length, flimsiness, and flaccidity of the penis of the other male.

Explicitly sexual comments which make women the object of desire also make male sexual organs an object of ridicule. The penis is objectified to the gaze of the audience. Its performance and its 'mysterious powers' are discussed obsessively. The simplistic way the female body is desired and appreciated in the plays is not comparable to the way the penis' subjectivity is deconstructed. The underlying plots, story lines, and current affairs all hint towards one reality, and that is the penis. The preoccupations about the functioning of the penis, rendered through everyday expression, questioning

if it is good enough or hard enough, etc., highlights male anxiety regarding sexuality. Richard Dyer's (1993) commentary on male sexuality in media is very close to my reading of media discourse in the Pakistani cultural context, as he suggests that the male body and sexuality is reduced to only its sexual organ, the penis, in establishing it as the focus of all his desire. The penis is rendered usually independent of the male body with a mind of its own, and it can't help itself. The symbolism around phallic identity demonstrates what the male psyche desires or fears the most and/but is not objectively real power as proclaimed. The phallus is continuously erect. It offers abundance and inexhaustibility. The erect, permanent, hard, tough, and strong penis is the symbolic form, which is in contrast with the real: 'male genitals are fragile, squashy, delicate things; even when erect, the penis is spongy, seldom straight, and rounded at the tip' (Dyer, 1993, 112). He examines how this visual symbolism has reduce male sexuality to the penis, cutting off other erotic pleasures while burdening the penis with 'the driving, tough, aggressive' characteristics that remove men from their sexuality. Male actors play around with the constant need to assert their sexuality by emphasizing the phallic object, which is usually contradicted by the flimsiness of the object. They continue referring to its bends, its shape that is never straight or hard enough. An initial challenge to a male opponent with a hard phallic object is dismissed after accepting its flimsiness. The jokes in the dialogues also play an important part in terms of telling people about general current affairs and other trends in the society. The actors also target men sitting in the audience by commenting on their sexuality in many ways by provoking, sometimes challenging or sometimes labeling them *tharkees* (flirt) and sexually frustrated. The laughter of the male audience is a sign of their approval of the liberties these comedians take in their performances. This symbolism has also infiltrated the popular visual culture of Pakistan where the cinema posters represent male heroes and villains with fragmented parts, like an angry face next to a female body with some tool/weapon raised to the man's face pointing towards the body<sup>96</sup>. Men are seldom portrayed in full

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<sup>96</sup> When I was interviewing the cinema board painter Arif Jaffar, for my master's thesis in 2001, he informed me that they like to use full female figure on the board

length, and painters rely greatly on this symbolism to hint at male sexual power. These cinema hoardings continue to represent male sexuality by forming the foundation of traditional myths that prevail in Pakistani culture, such as 'the idea of penis, and hence of male sexuality, as separable from the men... with a violent or bestial view of sexual intercourse' (Ibid.). The idea behind all of this is to relieve the man from his actions, a perfect tool of negotiation for male sexual desire in the face of rigid moralist social and political environment; it is not the man but his penis that is aggressive. He cannot help it - it is outside his body so it is out of his control. It is an individual entity. So the agency is exercised and yet men continue to play with the piety and moralist tools to negotiate their illicit desire.

This argument can be further understood by reading some other scenes of subversive sexual gestures by a marginalized person in the play. The servant tells the son that he wants to share the 'food' offered by Deedar. The son, rather than getting upset for his blatant desire and open defiance of his *ghairat* (honor), simply rebuts him with his wit and tells the servant to go and get his father's layered *paratha* (bread topped with oil) instead. There is a double subversion here. The servant first defies the boundary of his master's son, and then the son, rather than getting upset, ridicules his own father's old age and sexuality. These comments also help trigger the fantasies of many sitting in the audience who work either at home or in the office under a female employer. These sexual fantasies enacted live on stage, help achieve the real purpose of the play, which is to subvert social hierarchies and boundaries. The reference to sexual favors bestowed on male servants by housewives is very common in these plays. The male servants are given a voice in these plays, which also makes this public space beyond the reach of families to enjoy together.

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and only faces and hands of male heroes with them. His rationale for this criterion was that female bodies were inherently more beautiful, and therefore it makes sense to portray them on the huge hoardings whereas male bodies are not beautiful, therefore they were depicted only with angry expressions and/or with some weapons to highlight their masculinity.



Male sexuality's negotiation with sexual desire of a female in a public sphere takes on the notion of ridicule as its tool. The ridicule of male inability to sexually satisfy his wife is widely appreciated by the audience. In one scene the husband calls Deedar to warm some food, because she earlier gave him 'cold' tea. Hearing the compliant, Deedar looks at the audience and states, 'what should I do, when I make hot tea for you, you become cold'. In an earlier instance, Deedar provokes her brother to punish her husband with the rubber pipe by gesturing provocatively with her fingers and holding the gaze of the audience with a broad smile, saying, '*ghairat jaga veera*' (arouse your honor brother). Initially, he reassures her that he will arouse his *ghairat*, but then he gets upset and says, 'I can't arouse my honor, but you are constantly demanding, '*ghairat jaga, ghairat jaga*', how can I do it myself?' She laughs at him and says that if he had not been given the role of her brother, she would have made sure that he was fully aroused.<sup>97</sup> Everyone on stage and in the audience laughs at her blatant confidence about her sexual power. The audience first identifies with the actor, and feels more comfortable in desiring the actress on stage due to inability of the male actor, a successful tool to arouse desire, and then the actress becomes real by admitting on stage her capacity to 'arouse' desire. In the next dialogue, the brother reassures his sister that he will kill the husband by cutting him into special *totey* (pieces) which she never has seen before, making both Deedar and the audience laugh loudly at the direct reference to porn clips. This swift shift from reality to fantasy provides a powerful space of public celebration of male sexuality, even at the cost of ridicule.

In this play, the three female actresses/dancers, Deedar, Saima Khan, and Khushboo, perform two dances each. Deedar's first dance invokes spiritual feelings and leads towards carnal desire of the female performer. The songs used in these dances are from Punjabi films. Saima Khan first dances when she appears as the director of the *ungle* channel, and after the dialogues she is asked to come on center stage for her dance performance. First, she gives a solo performance on classical music and then goes

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<sup>97</sup> *Mirch Masala*, stage drama on YouTube, (0:35:25), Accessed: January 22, 2013. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=awlHjG1nbR8>

backstage to change into a traditional Punjabi dress to perform her sought after *mujra*. Her choice to select a *laacha* (wrap skirt) was appropriate in allowing the audience to see the length of her thighs through the folds of the wrap. The front seats of the stage are highly priced and the dancers, knowing this privileged seating as well as these audience members' socio-economic position, get close to the stage edge to let them have a closer look at their body. Khusboo also performed a Punjabi song while lip-syncing. She is shown yearning for her lover while she pleads with him to leave a love mark on her body parts. These lyrics are enacted while she directly touches her lips, neckline, and breasts, and moves and swings her pelvis in *jhumar* and *bhangra* routines (Punjabi traditional dance forms). The low neckline of her dress offers a generous view of her breasts. In the typical and most celebrated *mujra* stage dances, the dancer commonly shakes her breasts and swings her hips sideways, forward/backward, and in circular pelvic thrusts. The most seductive dance comes at the end. Deedar appears wearing a tight skin-colored elastic/viscose dress that clings to her body form. Her slim, tall, and well-toned body is emphasized by the dress, suggesting nudity, further accentuated by the blue triangular decorative strip covering her pelvis and horizontal strip to cover her breasts. Her transformation from a spiritual dancer to a seducer renders her as a versatile dancer. While this explanation is only to provide a sense of space these dances occupy in the larger scheme of stage play, I examine the visual and lyrics of dances critically in the following section.

### ***Mujra Video CDs of Stage Dances***

I have already explained that stage plays included *mujra* dance performances, available in VHS format during Eighties, and later shifted to VCDs for wider circulation in the market. Soon after that, a new trend started, in which a collection of *mujra* dances from a stage play were compiled in one CD with a new title and cover. *Mujra* dance CDs is a significant genre that display transitional phase of *mujra* practices between Punjabi films, stage show *mujra* dances and the *mujra* videos of the self-taught producers of Hall Road. Here, I examine the dance video CD of Saima Khan compiled from her

various stage mujra dances *Bay bas kaliyan* (helpless flower buds). The dances were also part of the stage play, which did not get any media attention, but the CD was an instant hit rendering Khan as a bold and seductive mujra dancer among many famous, beautiful, and skilled dancers. Due to the popularity and explicit sexual content, many cases were filed against Khan and the singer, Naseebo Lal, because mujra CD producers used songs by Lal for Punjabi films, which regained popularity through Saima Khan's explicit dance actions.

The CD cover states, 'Bay Bas kalyan / Super hit vol. 1 / my sexuality/ hot spices', and then, 'first time together / Saima Khan and Nida Chaudhry / a blast'. The font of the names and word 'blast' are designed with a shadow in perspective to give the illusion of rapid speed and to highlight a blasting rapture. Underneath, there is the producer's name, Malik Arif, and his mobile telephone number. These mujra dances were recorded when Khan performed live in two stage plays, and then developed into a CD format without crediting the stage plays. There are eleven songs sung by Naseebo Lal and her sister Nooran Lal. I examine here Khan's dance moves, her choice of dress, her use of the lyrics, and the performative space (Fig. 3.3).



Figure. 3.3 Bay Bas Kalyan, mujra dance CD cover

The dance I select from this CD is four and half minutes long. The song is by Naseebo Lal titled, *meri hik toun kameez hata ke ik wari othoun chum le*, (remove my shirt from my hips and kiss there). Saima Khan appears on stage

and stands in the center waiting for the music. Moving along the rhythmic beat of the music, she starts shaking her body. Her arms swing to a rapid *bhangra* beat, and while concentrating on the footwork she looks down at the movement of her wobbly breasts. Her flesh glistens with the oil she used to heighten her sensuality. With a wide smile, she looks intently into the eyes of the men sitting in the theater, appearing confident and aware of the power of her sexuality as she starts to enact the lyrics of the song<sup>98</sup>. In her dance she bends forward, while moving from one side of the stage to the other and touching the skin of her breasts precisely at the moment when the lyrics mention the place for kissing. Later she stands close to the edge of the stage with her legs wide open, touching her pelvis and sliding her hands down suggestively when the same lyrics about kissing are repeated in the song. She moves her hips in a suggestive manner, a hallmark of Punjabi female dances, and then she slowly straightens up to begin a fast-paced dance with her legs and arms, almost as if she were jumping in a gymnasium.

What makes her dance most alluring is the fact that Khan moves forward to the edge of the stage and keeps repeating the same shoulder movement that helps her breast shake extraneously. While she shakes her shoulders to let her breasts free, her bent-forward position offers a tantalizing peep into her shirt, exposing her nipple. Then she straightens up to dance another step and then moves towards the other side of the stage and repeats the same movement, so the people sitting on both sides can enjoy the same move. Then she further highlights her sexuality by turning her back towards the audience and vigorously swinging her hips. Turning three quarters she inserts her hand under the *laacha* (traditional wrap) she is wearing and lifts it up. She sits at an angle on her toes and runs her hand along the length of her thigh. The repetitions of the same movement are done with slight variations throughout, allowing the audience to imagine what will happen next. Her direct gestures are more like the sexual gestures of a charged female than a skilled dancer. What she shows to the audience sitting in the front row, opening her legs at the edge of the stage, is not repeated on

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<sup>98</sup> Saima Khan. *Be Bas Kalia*n, Mujra CD, (00:07/04/38)

the other side, although it was recorded on the camera for an edited clip collaged in the CD. The popularity of these dances is based on two levels of the gaze of the mujra lovers. The fact that it is a live performance with people watching while she performs makes it very appealing. The presence of the audience heightens the objectification of her sexuality, which is being consumed live so it appears natural and not constructed. The desire is manifested in real and is appreciated. On the second level, the CD makers, who place their cameras at the back of the audience, capture the close up shots of her body in different sexually evocative positions. These CDs are made for wider circulation, and they pander to male desire through exciting postures recorded in still form, and movements that are juxtaposed and collaged as jump-cuts while she is performing the mujra. Sometimes they also incorporate two or more dividers, which enable the video watcher to simultaneously enjoy all that is there on one screen. (Please refer to the Fig. 3.4a at 01:2/04:38)





Figure. 3.4 several screen shots of Saima Khan's mujra in Bay Bas Kalyan.

She is original in the sense that she is constantly improvising her sexual appearances in other mujra dances, while keeping true to her signature dance movements. In her vigorous movement to shake her breasts, she seems to be concentrating on her body and how she should be appearing. She knows very well the precise moment to look at the men and how to hold their gaze while they are watching her body, and all the while she is enjoying her own performance. The ease with which she commands her gestures to excite men is what makes her a confident and popular dancer. It is the same confidence she referred to when I asked her (discussed in the first chapter) how she feels about men watching her, and the way she controls them. She simply replied, 'it's a matter of confidence'.

It is important to read how Saima Khan synchronized the dance moves according to the lyrics. When the lyrics state *okhe wailey aavein na tou kam wai, faida ki aise yaar da* (if you don't satisfy me then what's the point of having a lover) she raises her left hand and makes a round form by joining her index finger and thumb while looking straight at the audience with a smile. She then quickly inserts her right hand's index finger in the round form, takes it out and shrugs her hand swiftly and gracefully at the audience. The simple gesture of making a circle and inserting a finger, suggesting

intercourse, is perfectly contrasted with the shrugging away of her hand, as if to shrug away her useless lovers, who are rendered useless because they are intently watching her dance but do not move to make love. The lover is unable to give her satisfaction so she thinks he is useless. While the lyrics are repeated, she moves to the other side of the stage in quick graceful strides, repeats the move, and gestures to the audience sitting in front with her hand, indicating that they are so useless. This hand gesture is also a typical Punjabi gesture, used primarily by women to condemn someone or to say how useless a person is, not necessarily in terms of sexual meanings. To strategically apply this gesture along the lines of the song and then smile at the audience, makes her sexually potent and powerful, and renders her imagined lovers' sexuality useless for her satisfaction. (Fig. 3.4 b)

This challenge of a woman to the man, but written by a man and sung and performed by women, recall Linda Williams' words that 'narratives of confession' have two sides (1999). The common popular understanding, as I demonstrated in the discussion around dichotomous practices and the understanding of female sexuality in the first chapter, is that, in contrast to men's insatiable and infinite desire for sex, women are not sexually active and therefore they locate other avenues for their satisfaction. But the woman here, on the dance floor, humiliates men's sexual prowess by implying that he is unable to provide her full satisfaction. For the men, it is very exciting to be challenged by the sexually charged female, so they don't find it problematic to their sense of masculinity. However, in the same token they will be label her as a fallen and disgraced woman capable of maneuvering and possessing power over men. This complexity is highlighted when they want to differentiate the real from the surreal world. The fantasy, it appears, is to enjoy outside the home, whereas reality is to be lived. In the theater hall a few hundred men together watch the dancer gesturing in her explicit sexual dance. Every one in the audience believes that the woman is pointing towards him, an invitation, a challenge to have powerful sex. When the woman, after inviting the man, gestures with her hand in a way that means 'oh just go away! You are useless', that is viewed as one of her highly

appreciated moves, which has consequently been copied by many newcomers in mujra dance videos.

The performance of Khan presents female sexuality as very robust and strong which ridicules male sexuality. To understand how this narrative is constructed, I met Altaf Bajwa, the lyricist of these songs, at his residence. He was sitting on the floor and waiting for us when we arrived, and he served us tea. His willingness to meet us for an interview at the first telephone call reflected his openness. He admitted that showing women as sexually powerful is a selling point for male consumption of mujra dances. As we were talking about some of the famous songs and their lyrics, he explained that theoretically speaking these words must deplete male ego, especially in verses like, '*chite khoon diyan botlan lawa le; jaitoon mere naal piyar karna e te yaari change jai hakeem naal la le*'<sup>99</sup>. But he furthered the argument that because men generally visualize these women as 'public' women it does not endanger their ego. For him, these songs are written keeping in mind the image of a 'bazaari' public woman. This is evident by the popularity of another very famous song by Naseebo Lal, '*mera aisa batan daba de we, meri khanti kharke we, main nasha ishq da laina teri hik te char ke we*' (press my button passionately, the bell sends shivers down there, I want to satiate my passion, by climbing on your hips). The text of these songs recognizes female desire and sexuality, and reading of these tells us about Pakistani society, which celebrates female sexuality. It is this very ambiguous space of narrative where one encounters the oppositional binary of private and public women. Considering the bans on the songs and dances of this album, and the response of people over Saima Khan's shoot in rain, discussed in the first chapter, the notions of piety, Muslimness and moralist value emerge as controlling techniques of female sexual desire. In one sphere, the man is enjoying the sexual powers and overt display of desire and in another, that very desire is feared and controlled. The complexity of this fear of satisfying and controlling women is further complicated. The women that they think will cover up any weakness or issues regarding their sexualities belong to

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<sup>99</sup> Translation: Arrange white blood (semen) bottles for your self from the doctor if you want to make love to me.



domestic spheres, but their sexuality should be controlled and thus they are unable to fulfill men's desires. They love to interact with a *bazaari*<sup>100</sup> woman because she knows how to satisfy them and also relieves them of the burden of satisfying her. The complexity of desire and its fulfillment is a fallacy, which Linda Williams describes as desire never fulfilled. The pornography industry flourishes on this fantasy that is not attainable and similarly, mujra dances incite desire which is never satiated. Shahla Haeri maintained that women's sexuality has been constructed for male's carnal desires which has generated an ambivalent approach to female sexuality that concentrates on what it needs to be in relation to male sexuality (1989). These narratives of desires that are written by men and performed by women play in between the fluid space where women assert their agency by mocking men at the time feeling confident of their own sexuality. The same *bazaari* woman is sexually empowered and uninhibited; she does not have the need to conceal any sexual weakness of the males she interacts with, and thus also defies the need to be part of piety discourse. Therefore the fear of getting exposed in front of their peers foregrounds the relationship men form with the *bazaari* women. The women who are considered low and fallen are considered more empowered and equal, if not in social respect, then in their desire.

Dress is very important in establishing the confidence and power of the mujra performer. In this video, Saima Khan is wearing a black dress with a crimson floral design print. This is a very contradictory and unusual decision because popular Punjabi film and mujra aesthetics favor bright colors, loud make-up, and glimmering gold and silver embroideries. Her choice of dress is very calculated. The material offers an elastic quality, which clings to the body where needed, yet is heavy enough to loosely drape around her breasts. A modern improvisation on Punjabi and India dance dresses, it is comprised of a *kurti* (a loose Punjabi blouse) instead of a *choli* (blouse that tightly covers the breasts while accentuating the form with exaggerated form and embroidered designs on and around the breast cups), and a *laacha* (traditional Punjabi wrap skirt). A very wide and deep neckline of the *kurti*

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<sup>100</sup> Bazaar literally means market, but in an Urdu's vernacular expression bazaar stands for diamond market.

allows a peep into her breasts; the zippers at both sides of the *kurti*, under the armholes, are used and improvised with at various stages of her dance with suggestive openings and closings of the slits. That also makes it easy for her to lift her shirt all the way up in the air and expose her body in a black bra. A slightly loose *kurti* is ideal for such dances because the act of revealing and then covering plays out better, adding sensuality to what would otherwise be merely a crude way of showing her sex. It allows the body to engage the curious gaze to search for one more glimpse of breast. A *choli* is meant to highlight the shape of the body by accentuating the fullness of the breasts as it hugs to the body form.

The skirt is also a modern improvised version of *laacha*, a Punjabi rural dress that covers the legs as a wraparound, with the skirt of the dancers in Indian films songs with classic dances (Fig. 3.5 a). This dress formed the necessary component of Punjabi film heroine's attire. These dhotis/skirts accentuate the form of the hips while pointing downwards from the pelvis. Khan's dress is tight around her hips and the front folds are rather loose and, as in the case of *laacha*, are sewn together and form a straight line going down from her pelvis to just above her knees, with an opening that is reminiscent of a *laacha*. The material's elasticity is again used very strategically. She lifts the skirt up to show the length of her leg in her swift dance movements while swinging her hips, and also when she sits on her toes to open her legs for a close look at her vagina (Fig. 3.5 b). Although she wears skin-colored mini leggings underneath, the camera's lens from distance captures the slight transparency of her tights. During the dance performance the CD cuts again and again to a quick shot of her opening legs and thus showing her slightly visible vagina.



Fig. 3.5 Detail: Saima Khan in *Bay Bas Kalyan* mujra dance,

This dance is a product of a stage play and the set design is treated in a simple manner to avoid any distraction. There is a typical sofa set present in a semicircular form with a red carpet on the floor. The plastic flowers in the pots are hanging on the walls as a decorative element, while the hint of windows is created through a wooden cutout of traditional carved screens used in the traditional interiors of Lahore's houses. The curtains on the side entrance doors are blue and burgundy. The set design highlights the fact that the production of the stage plays concentrates on the dances and not on the

stage design. The lights are used blandly. During this dance performance Khan shows her breasts many times by lifting the shirt up or by bending forward. At one point a man standing offstage, unable to contain his curiosity, tries to peep through the curtains, which is obviously visible in the picture frame. Immensely in control of her performance, Khan looks at him sideways without missing a single beat of her footstep or changing the expression on her face.



Fig. 3.6: Saima Khan being interviewed by Suhail Warraich on the very famous program *Aik Din Geo Kay Sath* (a day with Geo). Geo is a private cable channel, owned by the biggest media group of Pakistan.

Saima Khan was interviewed on Geo TV, a private Pakistani cable channel regarding her dance practices, particularly the infamous CD *Be bas kaliyan* (Fig. 3.6). The interviewer, Suhail Warraich, told her that she crossed all boundaries by removing her shirt on stage and showing her body. She responded very softly saying, 'I did not remove the shirt'.<sup>101</sup> Technically speaking, this is true, she only lifted it over her head, revealing her body underneath, and instantly pulled it back. To Warraich's other inquiry, regarding the making of this video CD, she claimed that she was completely

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<sup>101</sup> Saima Khan. Interviewed by Suhail Warraich. 0:50/2:12 retrieved on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=33F7ayqgaGs>

unaware of the recording of the CD, its editing style and technique, and then its circulation in the market.<sup>102</sup> She also stated that it was only after it became an instant hit that she became aware of its presence, and subsequently spent three and a half years clearing herself from the police and court charges in seven different cases of obscenity. This statement also reinforces the negotiating techniques men use for the fulfillment of their sexual desire - the dichotomies and denial. She very intelligently played with the popular mindset by claiming ignorance of the whole issue, since she became a target in media and the court of laws. I do not intend to investigate her statement as regards to her knowledge vis-à-vis the production of the CD. Instead, I will highlight the CD making process during the live mujra dances in stage shows. Her statements could arguably be contested, but if we consider the mujra video making process discussed in the last chapter, it is possible that she was only aware of the recording of the whole stage play, and did not know that her dances would be compiled in an exclusive CD for marketing. The play's producer, along with the editor of the CD at Hall Road, must have released the video without paying any extra money to Saima Khan. In this way, Khan's statement equates the making of her mujra video with the making of *Nangey* and *Gandey* mujra videos, with the only difference being that Saima Khan achieved notoriety but the other female performers remain obscure, and therefore do not deal with legal actions.

### ***Mujra Dance Video CDs***

These exclusive mujra dance videos are considered quite sophisticated because of their high production quality when compared with all the other mujra videos. In this segment I choose one dance and examine its several components, which are influenced by the popular mujra stage dances, but are also aesthetically linked to the film industries of both India and Pakistan.

These mujra videos are made with a lot of production details taken into consideration, including set designs, dance moves, dresses, light affects,

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid. 1:23/2:12

editing, and most importantly CD covers. The cost of the production is much more than other forms of mujra dances because the dancers also charge more than the unskilled dancers in the category I will analyze later. I examine here one of the dances performed by Khushboo, 'uff toofani raat hai'<sup>103</sup> (oof, a stormy night) to demonstrate the video mujra sensibility. The selected dance is directed by Zahoor Abbas and choreographed by Nigah Hussain. In the credits they also mention that the dresses are by Baboo, and editing by Shoaib Aslam, but it refrains from mentioning the singer's name and the performer's name. The five minute twenty-two second long video is visually influenced by a combination of Punjabi and Indian film songs as well as a popular MTV sensibility. Normally, a video CD consists of five new dances, along with some old repackaged mujra dances of two or more dancers, in order to make a comprehensive seven to twelve dance video CD. The songs from a Punjabi film are used without the permission of the film producers in the mujra dance videos. The important aspect to note is that the most famous songs, those that are full of explicit material, are used again and again by different mujra videos, making them a series of 'remakes' of the original songs. The lyrics of these songs are quite obscene but captivating. They usually celebrate female sexual powers and entice males to fulfill these dancing women.

The sets are especially designed for these dances. Once an elaborate set is designed for a particular 'hot'<sup>104</sup> song, it is used further by other dancers in the same album. Sometimes the same dancer uses the set with different dresses, distinguishable through the color. In order to break the monotony of the dance sequence, other dances with a different background are inserted in between during the editing process. The thematic link is established by bringing in close shots of the exclusive dance in a montage form throughout other dances. The close-up shots of exposed breasts, cleavage, and the opening of legs are also repeatedly collaged in the dances.

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<sup>103</sup> Khushboo. Mujra video on YouTube. retrieved: 7<sup>th</sup> January 2013  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KP4yjCtcmSk>

<sup>104</sup> I use this term used by producers and mujra fans, which is sometimes written on the CD covers to refer to a seductive and sexual dance/dancer.

The dances are also influenced by popular trends prevalent in the Bollywood dance numbers. Many elaborate details such as Nargis' song with a fish net and a few other dancing women in the background are a direct copy of the Indian film song 'Bobby' with Dimple Kapadia as lead dancer. Similarly, the dress and the approach to recording the dance of Khushboo in *uff toofani raat hai* is reminiscent of a dance by Madhuri Dixit in the Indian film *Beta* (Fig. 3.7)



Figure3.7 Madhuri Dixit in the film *Beta*. A screen shot of Madhuri's song on YouTube. 2012.



Figure. 3.8 Khushboo in the *uff toofani raat hai* mujra video

In this mujra video the dancing space is designed as a dream place to fulfill fantasies. A dark void surrounds the stage, making it feel as though it is floating in the vacuum, detached from real boundaries of land or horizon. The strong blowing winds, symbolizing the stormy night, play an important part in synchronizing the main theme of the song with the set design by using the long silk red and blue drapes. These flowing, theatrical drapes are attached to the four white pillars erected at the four corners of the black and white checkered tiled floor, marking the virtual boundary of the dance space. The only piece of furniture, a very elaborate bed with two side tables, is placed in the center.

Khushboo, the dancer, is shown at the beginning of the video standing in a three quarter profile clad in a yellow chiffon sari, with her left hand stretched backwards supporting the side of her sari, and the right hand placed on her slightly tilted upward head. The perfect sensual form created by her posture is further accentuated by the strong blowing winds, which



thrust back the flimsy material of her sari and reveal her midriff and cleavage. The camera pans down from top capture to frontal view of the static dancer, and instantly, she starts to move with ferocious but graceful twists. She makes the shape of a little eight by twisting her hips, flowing her arms in air, thrusting her breasts forward with synchronized pelvic thrusts. These are all modern renditions of the Punjabi *thumka* (sideway pelvis thrust in dance) style developed in Punjabi films. The close-up shot shows the yearning and longing of a woman burning with desire through her dramatic facial expression and the opening of her lips in a suggestive way.

These videos are essentially variations of dances from Punjabi films, but they are more elaborate and sensual than any Punjabi film dance, which usually include the presence of the hero around the dancer. These film songs rendered in mujra video form are free from the burden of film story, while the absence of the hero helps construct the fantasy world with the dancer of one's own choice. Famous popular songs are produced with almost all the mujra dancers present in the market, pandering to various levels of fantasies. People who like a particular song might like to watch different versions of mujra dances with that song. The followers of certain dancers remain loyal to their first choice while they watch other dancers for different reasons. Observing the dance movement, the ferocious desire emanating from the twisting and frolicking female body offering her sexual desire to the viewer, offers a fantasy of being seduced by a sexually powerful woman yearning for her lover. To identify oneself, it is important to transcend the role of hero present in the films - thus, mujra CDs provide a complete realm of fantasy and desire. Women desiring their lovers and expressing this desire with force have always been a central theme in the folklore of Punjab, which has penetrated popular consciousness. Linking back to the discussion in the previous chapter regarding the influences of the Punjabi Film Industry on mujra dance videos, I reiterate here that the discourse of representation of male-female desire and the female expression of desire for the male is linked with the Punjabi film narrative construction of female desire.

With obvious connections to folklore history, such as the famous love stories of *Heer*<sup>105</sup>, Punjabi films boast and celebrate the boldness, courage, and uncontrollable force of the desire of a woman for her lover. Nasir Adeeb, a Punjabi film scriptwriter, stated that, in folklore women have always desired men more than men have ever shown their love for a woman<sup>106</sup>. In the same vein as the love poetry of *Heer*, the video shows the yearnings of a sexually charged woman in a dark stormy night. The dancer moves back and forth, around the bed, on the bed, standing, sitting with legs wide open, then on the floor, running her hands all over her body, clenching them at her breasts and squeezing them tightly, a perfect shot captured in a close-up frame. The camera emphasizes the hip movement with certain angles that accentuate the shape and size of her hips. The sari is a useful costume for highlighting sexuality in Indian films, which was also extensively used here to cover and then reveal her midriff and cleavage. The wind blows through her long, thick, brown hair, covering her face; consequently she thrusts her hair away with a fierce movement of her head, a movement that is synchronized with her thrusting away of the long side of the sari that had initially covered her breasts. The camera is placed on wheels to swiftly and dramatically captures her dances from each angle. The editors have added more dramatic effects by placing the image of lightning striking her body precisely at the moment when the dancer is lip-synching the lyrics about the night and the prospect of sexual interaction. She touches her crotch and the light strikes (see Fig. 3.8). The swinging of her hips and body continues in a different manner, in a standing position on the floor and sometimes on the bed to express her yearning for a night with a lover. Her alluring body movements indicate her sexual desires by pressing her breasts hard and throwing back her head to further accentuate the form of her thrusting breasts. The details are enticing for men to visualize the physical reactions of the dancer who is performing the song. The absence of men desiring the woman is very obvious, but does not register to the viewer as the primary objective is to be enticed

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<sup>105</sup> These love stories are recorded in great epic poem called *Heer*, composed by sufi saint poet Waris Shah in Eighteenth century AD.

<sup>106</sup> Adeeb, Nasir. In interview at his home, Lahore 2010.

by the woman and not to force one's sexuality on her. In the end of the video, the dancer is shown cavorting alluringly by turning and twisting on the bed bursting with desire. Interestingly, the editor has failed to notice, in this sophisticated rendition of fantasy and desire, that the dancer has accidentally removed the sheets from the mattress with her heels. The brand of the mattress is visible due to its signature pattern, which is recognizable due to being shown on every channel during primetime. The end of the video is thus an abrupt shift from the fantasy to the real world, with an instant reminder of the material world that exists out there.

### ***Nangey and Gandey Mujrey***

In this section, I analyze the dances in videos of *nangey* and *gandey* mujras. These comprise some of the most significant form of mujra videos as shopkeepers and distributors have become producers, thus signaling the digital influx and piracy network infrastructures in the current cultural realm of Pakistani society. In the previous chapter, I focused on the production of these videos. Now, I examine the content of some of the selected dances to demonstrate the aesthetics that direct the production of such videos. This peculiar aesthetic is derived from the existing mujra videos, discussed above, but additional nudity is introduced due to two factors. Firstly, these distributors are directly linked to their buyers, which makes them aware of changing market trends and global trends in new media. Secondly, by making their own productions which do not entail much effort or cost, they are doubly benefiting since they receive both live personal entertainment and an increase in business.

The CD *Piyasi Haseena* (craving beauty) is a typical CD that is produced by a low-budget production team of shopkeepers. The word *piyasi* literary means a thirsty female. In this CD there are five songs and dances by the same performer and a few porn films clip from an Indian collection, which is evident from an insignia appearing in Sanskrit on the screen. I have selected one dance performance from this CD and two from another CD to examine the interior and exterior dancing spaces, dance moves, costumes, and editing style.

The start of the dance in *Piyasi Haseena* shows the dancer sitting in a half-reclined posture on the wooden dining table. She is holding one bottle of whiskey in her right hand while four others are placed sparingly around her. In this room, the walls are painted white and there is one window in the background, which is covered with burgundy and off-white curtains. The light pouring through the curtains reveals that the performance was recorded during the daytime. Very modestly decorated with only one big flower vase present at the corner of the table, the room reflects a middle class urban sensibility. The other dances were also recorded in the same room, but in those videos the dancer has shifted to the side and uses the big sofa and coffee table as aides in her performance. The tabletop is used very strategically for capturing seductive angles by placing the camera underneath the table and capturing from below. That angle, also popular in the Punjabi films, is more appropriate to accentuate the size and form of the body, especially the hips.

Another interior space appears on the song *pak gayan ambian* (the ripened mangoes). The room has green painted walls and a blue carpet with a blue velvet sofa and a square central table made of glass. There is also a huge dressing table. The total dance space is just the few feet where the three dancers are performing. The cameraperson moves down along their dance movements to capture the best angle when they are fully naked and showing their undersides. No attention is paid to lighting affects and only the wall lights are used.

The *Armaan* (desire) CD is a collection of mujras, which includes both exterior and interior spaces. In this typical dance, which takes place outdoors in some private garden/film studio/public garden, the dancer is shown completely drenched as rainwater is showered over her body. In these types of dances, the rain is an important part of the seductive aesthetics, continuing from the old Indian films till the present (Gazdar 1997). The monsoon has played long played a role in establishing desire, with the summer heat making the earth so hot that it is only quenched by the heavy rain that falls all over the land, as we know in the famous romantic film *Barsaat* (monsoon)

by R.K. Productions, released in 1949. The inadvertent comedy in these shots is that wherever the dancer moves the rain moves too, forming a puddle only at that spot. The evident lack of rainwater in the surrounding area does not make any difference to the producers, who achieve their target by showing the wet body. They are not concerned with creating a realistic environment. Variations on these kinds of dances include a fountain, a *charpai* (traditional wooden portable bed), different angles of the gardens, and sometimes the dance is even recorded on a rooftop in daylight. Outdoor evening shoots require lots of light effects, so they refrain from recording in the evenings. Only the big mujra productions incorporate light effects. These junctures constantly allow the viewer to travel between fantasy and reality. The fantasy in these videos is created through the notion that this real, out there, for the viewer to enjoy. It is not a dreamlike world, but an open and blatant display of desire.

The quality of dance varies in these videos. In the previous chapter, I explored the selection of dancers, and mentioned Khalid Jutt, the shopkeeper and producer of *nangey* and *gandey* mujra videos who stated that they don't care about the quality of the dance, but instead generally hire whichever prostitute is available at the time and make her dance. It is obvious from looking at the dances in these videos that it is the right connection or sheer luck of the producer that they get hold of a good dancer. In some instances, like the video of *piyasi haseena*, the performer is a middle-aged woman with rigid body movements. In that video she is shown sitting on the tabletop with a bottle of whiskey in her hand (Fig. 3.9a). Obviously drunk, she is in a delirious state, waiting and longing for a rapturous moment, waving her arms in air, swinging her body, and occasionally leaning over the tabletop. Her actions do not take her any further and she switches from a wild state to active dancing. Her dance movements are halted by minor breaks between the movement of her hips or arms. She looks at the camera and then the person who must be standing next to the camera, it seems for further instructions. She appears to be more concerned about her dance moves, as if deciding what to do instead of naturally sliding into the swinging mood. She

tries to show her sexual desire through opening her legs wide, shaking her breasts, and running her hand over her body, but her eye contact with the person behind the camera betrays her. The crude way she manages to show her body does not allure fantasy for the viewer.

In another scene, she is abruptly shown standing on the tabletop while the camera films her from below. She continues swinging her hips and then she looks up and remembers to lift her wrap skirt up so that the camera can have a better view of her inner thighs. In this dance she gives the impression that she is not wearing anything underneath. While she starts the dance by completely exposing her breasts, the viewer is not able to see inside her legs. In another dance in the same CD, where she incorporates the sofa into her dance, at one point she reclines on the sofa and raises her legs up in the air. This act reveals that she is wearing small underwear that slides away and exposes her vagina. Her switching to this posture was not done through her dance movement, but used as a jump-cut collaged piece inserted in between travelling across the screen and morphing into different shapes (Fig. 3.9b). Therefore, her total dance performance is reduced to these collaged pieces that repeatedly show her body. The moment when she raises her legs into the air is awkward because she is trying to look at the camera, and her expression does not excite or invite anyone, but instead shows her need to get approval for her moves. Her entire dance performance appears to be a montage of forced movements by someone who has no dance skills.



a.

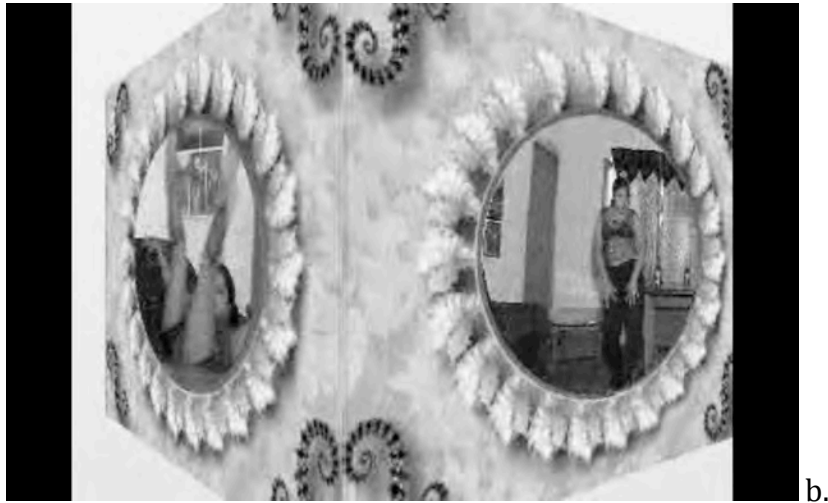


Fig. 3.9 A screen shot of mujra dance *Piyassi Haseena*.

The second dance that I mention earlier, to the song *pak gayan ambiayan* (the ripened mangoes) is an appropriate example to understand the dynamics of the production, which dictate the dance aesthetics in *nangey* and *gandey* mujras. In this song, three young girls are shown standing together in a dark green room with a blue sofa next to the wall. They start moving their bodies in unison by picking the lead up from each other. Wearing different colored wraps around their hips and simple T-shirts as tops, they simply swing their bodies and arms. At one point one of the girls lifts up her wrap to show her bare body underneath, and upon seeing this, the second girl does the same and then the third one follows (Fig. 3.10a). Their clumsiness is made up for by their youthful bodies and much more active and energetic body movements. However, their eye contact with the person standing next to the camera replicates the experience of the previous dancer. From the direction of their looks it can be deduced that the producer is standing next to the camera, and throughout the course of their dance they constantly look to him for direction. They look up and then quickly pick up the pace or change their dance moves. In one scene, the three young girls abruptly take off their clothes as they continue dancing, twisting, and swinging their arms and hips while wildly shaking their breasts (Fig. 3.10b). The song's lyrics are about the ripening of the mangoes and allude to the long night during which lovers meet and enjoy each other. At the mention of the

ripening of the mangoes, the girls lift their tight tops and bras upward and start shaking and touching their breasts.



a.



b.

Fig. 3.10 Screen shots of *pak gayan ambiayan*

In comparison to the dance of the two discussed above, the dance in the exterior space in the rain is the most alluring of all. The dancer is shown wearing a long purple skirt and a tight blouse with a low neckline, which partially reveals her breasts and also her midriff. These scenes of exposed flesh are used appropriately in close-ups to emphasize her twisting waist and wet flesh. The way her voluptuous and sensuous body twists in seductive movements, and the way she thrusts back her wet hair with a delightful broad smile, demonstrates that she is in a thrilled state ready for rapture. She appears to be very pleased with her dance moves, and to be enjoying her body in the pouring rain, which is evident from the way she looks directly into the lens of the camera i.e. seductive facial expressions and a smile. Appearing to be aware of the working of the camera, she moves her body very confidently in front of it, knowing very well which angle works better to heighten the lasciviousness (Fig. 3.11). In terms of her display of sexual



power, her dance style very closely resembles the dance of Khushboo whom I discussed earlier in the sophisticated mujra CDs with designed sets. The gaze of the camera is very obvious and direct in these performances. In many instances, we come across the shadow of the cameraperson falling over the ground or body of the dancer, a reflexive moment of the producers' whims. In some videos other men accompanying the cameraperson are shown and which are not edited afterwards. When the shadow of the cameraperson falls at some point on the grass as the dancer in the rain is dancing in a frenzied state, it connects the performer with the recorder in the picture screen of the video.

The editing is also done by self-trained professionals sitting in the make shift studios of the shops at Hall Road. In mujra dance videos' peculiar editing style, the chronological order of the scenes is not given much consideration. The 'hot' clip is usually shown in the trailer to entice men to carry on watching in anticipation of more explicit clips. After showing their exposed bodies the dancers are often shown dancing fully dressed as they did in the beginning. The narrative is not constructed as a story, such as in typical fantasy porn films, but is a mishmash of images enticing sexual desire. In the song, *pak gayan ambiayan*, when three young girls start to dance fully naked, the video continues to show them again and again wearing their skirts and tops. The body language is also different and reveals the first and last stage of the dances. The clipped scenes are merely pieced together for visual pleasure. The song in the background is sometimes referenced at strategic points, as when the women squeeze their breasts and point their hands towards their pelvis to accentuate lyrics' intended meanings. Khalid Jutt, the producer, stated that excessive flesh, 'big hips and fat asses' is the demand they keep in mind while shooting, so they try to keep the position of the camera at an appropriate angle to capture the most alluring views. Close shots of hips from under the table and their repeated showing during the dance is the what makes *masala* piece in Pashto films. Jutt further explained that, close up shots of a dancer shaking her breasts just at the moment when she reveals them are the most popular cut-pieces. Thus, like pornography,

the sexual body parts act independently from the characters or personalities (Nichols 1991). He further claimed that in *desi totay* (local porn clips), one is able to make a skillful and technically wide-ranging film. For him, these haphazard jump cuts incite sexual desire. The sex, and showing women only, is more important than the dance.

Another song which mentions a man's shyness is '*gand sharmaan di khol we, we main dag mag dolaan, wichoon zor di awaz aye, thaa! thaa!*' (come out of your feeling of coyness, I am already swaying, and the sound is coming from inside, bang! bang!). The Punjabi expression is very direct and it is very aptly used to express desire, which could come across as crude or vulgar. The various nuances that this rich language uses to show desire can vary from decent to vulgar without even naming the sexual act or organ directly. The popular vocabulary includes sounds that imitate such things as gunfire and the sound of a penis entering a vagina (Batool, 2004, 98). In another song the penis is nicknamed '*babloo*', a common name for a very cute little baby boy. In that song when the singer sings '*babloo pa, pa, pa*', it means the penis enters the vagina. The song lyrics are: My shirt soaking wet/My sarong/skirt also soaked/on my body your hand moves lazily, my love/Today the drops got squeezed out of the clouds and a drop left on my hips. She explains that the clouds have emptied their water and a drop is left on her hip. And there it goes, babloo pa! (Johnny, push, push, push/O Tommy, push). In another Punjabi song, *Ek lat chukaan te savair paa diyan; dooji lat chukaan te haneer pa diyan*<sup>107</sup> (if you want to satisfy me it will take you the whole night to satisfy me partially; and if you want to satisfy me fully, then it will take you the whole day). That shows one of the major fantasies, where men believe that this woman who is posing this challenge to them is also inviting them, and that is what makes it most electrifying.

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<sup>107</sup> Mujra song on YouTube. Retrieved: July 2012.  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WHleDTGGaok>,



Fig. 3.11 In terms of editing, the close shots of the breasts and hips of the dancer in rain are juxtaposed in two parallel screens.

As I mentioned earlier, in *nangey* and *gandey* mujra videos one often gets a glimpse of the male participants. Khalid Jutt, while describing the production process, stated that the male presence is usually edited out during the postproduction process. He explained that in the few videos where males are present they have covered their faces to keep their anonymity. The discomfort of men with the movement of their bodies is also evident in some of the dances in this genre (Fig. 3.12 a & b). I argue that the moment the male body, primarily situated as a spectator, enters the camera frame to perform with the female dancer, is precisely when he decides to shift from the powerful position of a voyeur to a subject of the camera's lens in order to express his desire physically thus exposing him to a position of vulnerability. Therefore, the third eye of the lens disturbs his physical manifestation of desire and reveals the contradictions present in the powerful position he has assumed historically.



a.



b.

Fig. 3.12 screen shots of a mujra dance in a public park. Notice the number of people in the background watching the video shoot. The man enters the screen and resorts to simple gestures like drenching the dancer with water/vodka from the plastic Nestle bottle. This is a typical dance scene in a public park, but male entry is not very frequent. 3.12b is a screen shot of a man in mujra porn dance with his face covered.



Fig. 3.13: Sultan Rahi as *Maula Jutt* where Anjuman is dancing to please him.

The occasional entry of a male is only a repetition of the tradition of a Punjabi hero who does not express his desire but waits silently, as expressionless as a wooden log. This phenomenon, of a silent male watching

a sexually charged woman, entered the film industry in the 1970s, primarily with the introduction of 'Maula Jutt' by Nasir Adeeb (Fig. 3.13). The main motive behind the construction of the male hero, devoid of the expression of his desire for women, was to show that it was always the woman who would go after the hero in her desire for him. This is also in contradiction to the practices in our society, where men are supposed to lure women, and where they can express their desire for females more openly than females, who constantly fear for their reputation. *Maula Jutt* represents the moment when masculinity and desire were epitomized on a silver screen, as stated by Ali Khan and Ahmed as 'embody an idealized masculine projection of the downtrodden Pakistani peasantry' (2010, 155). The silent, static male, and active female was important, a fact also addressed in the stage play I discussed in the beginning of this chapter. This trend continues on stage when the performer dances to the tunes of a prerecorded song; every man sitting in the theater hall identifies himself with this notion of a hero who needs to remain calm and enjoy the inviting gestures of the dancer<sup>108</sup>.

On the other hand, the *Saturday Night* series was made to introduce male dancers along with female performers, which aimed at radically transforming the popular mujra dance form. That video was groundbreaking in the sense that it brought both males and females together in front of the camera, both subject to the gaze of camera and the audience, while it appeared to be catering to a mixed female and male audience. All the models, about six or seven couples, belong to the same social class as those of the previously discussed mujra dance videos. But they all act as if they are having a party at their own home. This is also the first video CD where male bodies are viewed as objects of desire. Their level of comfort with their exposure in front of the camera is remarkable (please see Fig. 3.14). I found Nichols' (1991) reference to Baudrillard's perception of reality simulated by images to be very relevant to how I am approaching the images of bodies represented in raw homemade videos of dance in Pakistan. If these images fulfill some ideas about pleasure and plentitude, then the images of the bodies become more powerful than the real bodies they are representing,

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<sup>108</sup> YouTube, <http://tiny.cc/dance104>

which are out of reach and non-attainable, due to their presence on a certain medium.



Fig. 3.14 a screen shot of one of the songs in *Saturday Night* mujra videos.

### ***The advertisements promising better sex***

Many CDs, when viewed on TV screens, feature a strip with advertisements that run across the screen advertising magical aphrodisiacs and potency boosters. The contact number and address to order are provided with direct straightforward expressions promising miraculous results, while the dancer is wildly shown dancing in the background. Some of the texts state 'Kastoori: a complete marriage course, a guaranteed treatment of impotency', 'Jaifal Tala of Saudi Arabia increase sexual potency', and 'Beetroot essence: from Saudi Arabia for 80 Rupees' (Fig. 3.15 a, b & c). These advertisements are constant reminders to the man to not miss the chance for a happier indulgence in his fantasy. Appearing while the man is watching mujra videos, this is the perfect time and place to advertise playing with male fantasies and desires. The fact that these CDs are not only catering to masturbation practices, but also promise a stronger and longer erection during intercourse is clear from these advertisements on the video. It is pertinent to find parallels in the present cultural practices of popular local 'German' health centers in Pakistan, also known as '*unani*' (2005, 54), which supply aphrodisiacs and sell cures for 'problems in unhappy sexual life'. Their advertisements on walls, promising to fulfill fantasies, surround the landscape of Pakistan in both rural and urban locations. What are the modes of articulation in

such popular forms? In the presence of these explicit sexual practices the silence, dismissal, or non-recognition of these scripts has become so obvious, to posit Kimmel's claim, that it doesn't acknowledge any debate. The fact that several kinds of aphrodisiacs and Viagra are available in these shops is a crucial part of their selling strategies. They sell these capsules for 150 rupees that they get for only 50 rupees, as one of the shopkeepers stated,

‘the maker of such capsules approached him and said that there must be some old men who cannot arrive at sex or even get an erection after watching these mujra dance videos, so please keep these in your shop as a side business for your customers. Now they take it for sex after watching these films’<sup>109</sup>

The CDs now come with full information about all kinds of homeopathic remedies, herbal oils and medicines, and other chemically made medicines for various sexual problems and diseases, all with the promise to increase sexual potency. *Kama Sutra* is the most popular text on lovemaking, and it has found its way into the crudest printings, found on the footpaths of the old city of Lahore at a very cheap price of a few rupees. The text is usually a simple summary of some of the ‘key elements’ of *Kama Sutra*. This links the various influences across the region by following on Charu Gupta's study of obscenity in Colonial India. In her words, ‘Printed sex manuals in Hindi made up a genre that saw substantial growth in early-twentieth-century UP. Aligarh and Moradabad appear to have been thriving centers of publications’ (2005, 53). The title need not acknowledge that it is a summarized version of *Kama Sutra*, but names are given such as ‘A Guide to a Happy Marriage’, ‘A Key to Successful Marriage’, and, ‘Things That You Should Know Before Marriage’ (Fig. 3.16). They come with some very mechanical illustrations displaying certain positions. The presence of these texts suggests people's reliance on them, which are mainly for the consumption of males.

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<sup>109</sup> Khalid Jutt. In an interview in Lahore 2010.





a



b



Fig. 3.15 screen shots displaying advertisement strips running on the mujra dance videos.



Fig. 3.16 An image of the cover of three books to show the kind of sex manual available on roadside book stalls, which are amalgamations of many historical influences.

In conclusion, I reframe my main argument developed, by critically examining the visual and lyrical content of several genres of mujra dance videos. Continuing with the genre discussion of the last chapter, I argued that mujra dance videos are continuing their visual and lyrical links with the peculiar aesthetics as well as form and content developed in Punjabi film industry. The

mujra dance songs are directly taken from Punjabi films without the film producer's permission, and the same song is sometimes used simultaneously in several different videos with various dancers, offering a spectrum of dance and seduction. I presented through my analyses the power of a sexually charged female performer mocking masculinity in a live public stage show. These mocking narratives, I argue, contextualize the complexity prevalent with masculinity and manifestation of sexual desire. Further on, these narratives of desire are all written and produced by males, only sung and performed by females, shows how male desire fantasizes sexually powerful public women with insatiable sexual appetite. This complexity in masculinity is interrogated further in the chapter of consumption of mujra videos later on in this dissertation, where actors perform their agency and constantly negotiate it against other actors. This chapter frames the main argument of male desire and its complexities within the larger socio-political context and discursive practices, discussed earlier in the first chapter, while threading together the transition of mujra dance from cinema screen to live performance and then to digital CDs.

## Chapter 4



## **Mujra Dance Video and its Distribution: Changing Centers of Desire**

In this chapter, I examine the way masculine desire employs creative routes and infrastructure to consume mujra dance videos. I present through an examination of unique circulation and distribution networks, including the video CDs' production and distribution in the shops at Hall Road, private cable networks, and Internet cafes, that at these circuits, objects of desire exchange hands through several modes, negotiations, and user friendly digital and new media technologies. I argue that the creative network of piracy draws on new media and digital technologies and has helped develop mujra dance videos into an informal industry. The agency of male desire and its successful use of techniques of negotiations with state and religion in the form of authoritarian control, issues of morality and desire, are examined here to supplement the larger research question of male desire and subversion of state's control. It also addresses the question of the transformative aspect of new media including the Internet and video CDs as an alternative to the old tradition of mujra dances, whereby virtual space and Internet cafés are the new sites of sexual practice and consumption. Drawing heavily from Brian Larkin and Ravi Sundaram's study of networks and circuits of piracy, this chapter critically examines mujra dance video networks mushrooming everywhere for the fulfillment of male sexual desire, in the face of police control, subverting orthodox state control, and defying preconceived notions about digital literacy in the developing world.

This chapter consists of two sections in order to analyze the distribution of mujra CDs separately. In the first section, by employing descriptive analysis, I discuss the several Internet cafes, shops and other means of distribution of mujra dances. The centers of desire shift hands while the product changes its shape and form to comply with the changing needs of the distribution modes. The second section provides the analytical framework by first explaining the era of the orthodox rule of General Zia-ul-Haq in the 1980s, when videos became products of mass consumption. It is

significant for the analysis to understand how the ideological and discursive practice helped establish the infiltration of the circuits of desire at the time when the Hudood Ordinance was introduced in the name of the Islamization process. While the ordinance was initiated to control the illicit sexual practices of citizens, VHS, and later digital technologies, took over the existing infrastructures of the city as an agent of distribution and circulation. I follow closely the investigation of infrastructures of underdeveloped countries by Brian Larkin. For him, these infrastructures are instated by the official setup that itself generates the possibilities of corruption including media piracy, as 'it develops its own structures of reproduction and distribution external and internal to the state economy' (2008, 218). On similar structures, it is appropriate to apply his argument to understand the flux of new media in Pakistani society, where the orthodox regime has relaxed its control over the use of VCRs and their centers of distribution in society. Parallel economic structures in Pakistan also nurture not only the pirated materials, but also the pornographic material and mujra dance videos. The term 'parallel' is used here on similar lines with Ravi Sundaram's term, with an understanding that the informal sector and its economy is a subset of parallel economic structures operating side-by-side (2010). These informal parallel structures include all products that are considered in its strict sense illegal, including bribes, pornographic materials, and prostitution in the Pakistani official, legal, and economic system. The two sections together locate the way digital culture has developed and is circulated.

## ***Section 1***

### ***Distribution centers of mujra dance videos***

In this section I present a vast array of distribution centers present in Lahore, through which mujra dance videos exchange hands with buyers. These various centers of distribution also help transform the shape of the material due to their peculiar nature of transferring the material to the buyer.

### **Shops with mujra dance videos**

Video shops are present all over Lahore, selling videos and music CDs for all age groups, tastes, and genres, including religious, informational, entertainment, Hollywood, Bollywood, cartoons, and porn. The shops at Hall Road serve two purposes: they manage the dealing and distribution of the videos, and are also responsible for assembling and repackaging the videos from their existing data. This data consists not only of porn clips and mujra videos, but also a vast repository of film, copied illegally and distributed in the wholesale market. Other shops in the city rely heavily on the materials available in Hall Road. In shops located in the up-market area, where female and family access to the shops is more frequent, the display is careful but suggestive by offering a few decent videos over the counter to tantalize the customer, but the more juicy and central material is available under the counter. The aesthetics of the display is governed by the location, not only because of the economics of the area but also due to values of certain classes, manifested in the same area, and significantly certain spaces which are designated as exclusive male domain versus spaces engaged only with families and females. The under the counter policy rules in spaces with more female presence in the shops, which reflects a parallel increase in the 'secret' and 'private' culture of male indulgence in sexually explicit materials with an increase in empowerment of the female in public spaces.

I visited a few shops in the up-scale market areas of Defence, Model-Town and Fortress Stadium Cantt (which is primarily a military residential area, but many civilians also live there). They usually choose trendy names for shops, including words from English, such as Off Beat, as well as some Urdu words/terms, like Mausiqar (musician), which are considered ethnic and fashionable (Fig. 4.1). The large glass windows offer a huge mixed display of films and videos to the passers-by on the road. Inside, the shopkeepers usually play music, making it an inviting interior space to shop at leisure. The videos are displayed on the shelves according to genres, with an open access that makes it easy for customers to flip through numerous choices. In the same open and casual manner, the mujra CDs are usually



displayed in a tray placed on top of the counter. The link among these videos is created through placing comedy stage shows DVD/CDs in the front row and then mujra CDs at the back. If one is seen seriously leafing through them, then the shopkeeper arrives for assistance. I noticed in a shop, named *Musicmaker*, a customer selected several videos from this collection. The shopkeeper, while looking around, took out a few more videos placed under the counter. The customer selected some and then put the rest back. After the customer left, I casually went to look at the CDs displayed on the counter. Although the shopkeeper was looking for an indication to assist me he did not offer more videos from his collection under the counter even though he saw me taking an interest in mujra CDs by showing some of the titles to my friend standing with me in the shop. So I asked him directly if he had other videos, to which he replied that the total variety was present in that tray. His non-interest in showing me more videos revealed his desire of not sharing the male's 'mutual' indulgence in sexual desire and which ultimately surpassed his desire to sell. I recalled my visit to Zaitoon Plaza, which I discussed previously, when the shopkeeper told me to my face that they did not have mujra and semi-porn videos that I needed. I wondered what happened in a shop that would be visited by males, females, and children. I was also reminded of Salman and Ali's (the *Saturday Night* mujra CD makers) statement, about how they were shocked when a woman demanded in a very straight forward manner some porn videos in a video shop in Defence. The discussions with producers, a female visual artist who enjoyed watching porn videos, and my own observations in video shops revealed how women are perceived as inactive beings without any sexual desire. Until any female crosses the 'morality' line in a public space, she is viewed as an ordinary person, not interested in porn or other kinds of mujra. People do not imagine her to such kinds of interests until she herself proclaims so in public.



Fig. 4.1 These images show video shops in middle class localities of Lahore. Due to sharp sunlight, the glass window is covered during the daytime.

The shops in Hall road cater to the wholesale business, and therefore do not care about designing the interior spaces of their shops. They also go for simple shop names, like 'Tip Top Music', 'Tariq Videos', 'Salman CD Shop' and many more, usually including the names of the shopkeepers. They also sometimes chose names marking their religious affinities, like 'Al-Rahim Audio and Video Center' ('Al-Rahim' is one of Allah's attributes, meaning Merciful), 'Chishtia Music Center' (which is named after a Sufi order), and so on. Usually, the shops facing the roadside also keep electronic products and offer repair services, whereas shops located within the plaza exclusively sell

CDs and DVDs. The storage spaces sometimes extend to corridor spaces (Fig. 4.1).

The shops on Hall Road are exclusively male spaces, as I mentioned in the first chapter, and therefore the shopkeepers are usually very open in dealing with their customers without any ambiguity in regards to the needs and wants of the buyer. The seller and buyer both understand the terms and values of the products and deal accordingly. Sometimes, if they feel that a buyer is feeling shy, then they help him out by offering him some tips and suggestions- a good business strategy to make the buyer aware of his needs. Occasionally some people visit these places with their families, who are also interested in buying an electronic product. Dealing with such customers requires a careful negotiation and use of terms. For instance, Kashif, a shopkeeper at Hall Road, told me about one of his customers who came with his family to the shop. He bought a few films for his child, some for his wife, and a few for himself. Kashif then asked him if he wanted to taste some *meethey chawal* (sweet rice). Initially, the customer looked at him in confusion, but then he got the hint. So he asked him to put a few in the same pack. Although the shop was located on Hall Road, which is primarily a male domain, bringing his wife along changed the dynamic of the sale which required code words as a natural consequence of censorship. Whether the male customer shares that coding with his wife at home or not depends on his level of comfort with his wife. The distribution gets more creative and inventive when the female gender enters here, and the seller accordingly changed the terms for the material he wanted to sell. This ensured that the buyer, who would not like to be labeled in a certain manner in front of his wife, would not have his personal life affected. These modes of transformation, altering the names of the goods in order for them to reach the buyer, even at the local level, signifies their mutable and fluid nature which helps them survive in the otherwise overbearing environment.



Figure. 4.2 Storage spaces of shops in Zaitoon Plaza

The shopkeepers in these plazas are involved in making a complete package of mujra videos. They keep a big photographic collection of the dancers, used for making the designs of the titles (Fig. 4.3). These producers/shopkeepers record the dances and then compile them together with additional dances from their database and sell them with a new title. Sometimes these CDs are compiled with new covers using images downloaded from the Internet juxtaposed with local names and titles, like

*'jawani mastani'* (wild sex), *'nasha barsaat da'* (intoxicating monsoon), *'jawani kare tang'* (feeling hot), and so on. It should also be noted that the small shops selling and repairing mobile phones have small counters in the bazaars where people can just pick and choose songs, ringtones, dances, and movie clips, and get them uploaded for a very cheap price.

One buyer outside of Zaitoon Plaza told me that the products sold in the stalls outside promise a lot on the cover of the CD, but once the actual CD is played, there isn't much material. On the other hand, he said, the CDs for sale in the shops inside Zaitoon Plaza include exactly whatever is promised on the cover. This statement resonates with the practices discussed by shopkeepers/producers Khalid Jutt and Mohammad Sher, who, a week after shooting a mujra dance, were thinking about finalizing the title and cover design. They had not decided earlier, and were simply going to choose from amongst a number of titles circulating in the market and add a volume number to it. That explains why many of the CDs in the market have a new title but the material inside is from an old collection. The image below (Fig 4.4) demonstrates an extra explanation through 'wet dances' which is handwritten on the top of the CD cover titled '*Choli Ke Peeche*', a title selected from a very famous Hindi film song featuring Madhuri Dixit.



Figure. 4.3 This image depicts photographs in the collection of shopkeeper at Zaitoon Plaza in Hall Road.



Figure 4.4 Mujra CD named after Madhuri Dixit's song.



Figure 4.5: A shop in Zaitoon Plaza, named OK CD and DVD Corner.



Figure 4.6 These images show Hall Road with video and mobile phones stalls on the street.

### **Cable TV Network**

Another center of the dissemination of mujra dance videos are private cable networks, which have access to most households in the urban localities of Pakistan. Analyzing its mushrooming growth and influence is important primarily due to its transformative nature of converting TV and computer screens into sites of mujra dance, which used to traditionally be in a public setting, in courtesan/dancers' place, surrounded by men. The private channels STN and NTN started operating in the 1980s; proper cable television was first introduced to Pakistan in the mid 1990s. The underground private ventures of transmitting telecommunication services through cable-operated modes were initiated by some private groups, catering to neighborhood households for a small charge. Beginning in Karachi in 1992, cable networks served as an alternative to expensive satellite TV channels and DVD video channels for people unable to afford the luxuries of expensive pay per view channels and DVD players. Originally, these cable television networks provided services primarily to large cities, like Lahore and Karachi, but with the passage of time more entrepreneurs got involved in the industry to make the service available in other cities as well. It has now become the most popular form of receiving TV signals in Pakistan, and according to some estimates 78 per cent of the urban population has access to it (Khan, 2010). The illegal cable networks are still operating, using an analogue system of playing videos, films, and stage plays on their DVD players and transmitting them through their local networks. These are not licensed channels. Even today, when PEMRA claims to control the cable operators, many of these cable operators continued to relay entertainment to homes at cheaper costs.

The control of the state over these illegal cable operators is subject to its location and social class influences. The up-scale residential and commercial areas are monitored more regularly by PEMRA authorities, therefore cable networks seldom show such channels there. But in middle and lower class areas, the state has less control over these cable operators, as my research demonstrates through the information given by an interviewee..



Mujra dance videos are relayed constantly on these channels, which can be viewed 24/7 in the domestic space of homes. These networks of cable operators have helped transfer the products to the masses at a very low cost, while eliminating the boundaries between public and private entertainment.

Cable TV networks have played a major role in popularizing mujra dances (Fig. 4.7). Because of its constant presence, people have become accustomed to viewing mujra along with their families. The debate around private versus public space and the domestic sphere in relation to male sexual fantasies is examined in the next chapter within the framework of consumption in domestic sphere. The cable operators sometimes play specific mujra videos on their customer's demands as well. Even though one constantly hears people's concern regarding lower social morality as a consequence of the cable networks, these networks continue to play these videos to satisfy their customers. There are no specific scheduled allotted times for separate adult and children viewing, and it has become an accepted practice to have these videos on cable every day.



Figure 4.7 A food and tea stall in Shadbagh with a TV showing mujra on TV.

### **The Open and Secretive Discourse of Net Cafe Culture in Lahore**

The most active centers of circulation of mujra dances and pornographic material, available to all age groups in every locality, is the network of Internet cafes (popularly known as 'net cafes'). The first Internet connection was established in Pakistan in 1994. Within a few years, Internet cafes mushroomed in public spaces. They are networks of circulation and consumption simultaneously. The cafes are centers that distribute material, including mujra dance and porn videos, both for literate and illiterate consumers. The digitally transformed live mujra stage show performances, which are part of the collective virtual archive distributed through Hall Road, are only one click away from the mujra dance fans in these centers of desires. This transformation of the form of mujra videos, and their mass distribution, makes this center of distribution a significant component in the circuit of desire. These cafes are exclusively male spaces (Shafique and Mahmood, 2009 check in bibliography), and female students seldom visit them on a regular basis, as demonstrated through this quote 'feel deprived of a favorable environment in Internet cafes. They complained of people watching unethical websites, movies, playing songs and smoking at these places' (Yousaf, 2012, 143). These Internet cafes are present throughout the city, especially in middle and low economic areas, which also include students' residential hostels.

The Internet cafes are small office spaces hired/rented in small and big plazas with offices and shops. The interior of the Internet cafe varies according to their location, but not much effort is made on the decoration. Simple boxed compartments with PC sets are constructed to provide some privacy to individual users from each other. These help shield the computer screen from the next user and also provide cover from the chest downward. A carefully designed interior space for private male interaction with porn sites caters to the individual male's sexual release through masturbation. The Cafés used to have private cubicles to provide a comfortable environment for sexual interaction between a couple. Those private rooms are now illegal by law, because of the strong public and state reaction after much publicized net

cafe scandals in the media. These cabin partitions offered enough private space for a couple to have a quick sexual interaction (Fig. 4.8). Usually the owners and their employees/friends sit at the counter at the entrance to the cafe and appear to be non-intrusive but are in fact carefully monitoring the activities of users through the main network on their computer. To open an Internet cafe requires a basic knowledge of the hardware and software of the computers, a suitable space, and equipment. Some of these cafes are owned by people who do not operate them themselves but have hired technicians, who help customers in their various tasks.





Figure 4.8: Images A & B show the interior space of a net cafe, with entrance and cabin structures for user's privacy. I took image B in 2006 for my research for a BBC film. Image C is a screen shot from the net cafe scandal video depicting the interior of a cabin space in a net cafe.

In one of my video-recorded interviews from 2006 for the film on masculine desire for the BBC, a cafe owner explained how he devised a system to entertain computer illiterate people looking for sexual entertainment. Since his net cafe was in an improvised locality, many computer illiterate men, on their way home from factories, stayed briefly to watch mujra dance videos, pornography, and other sexual material available at his net cafe for entertainment, and to get a quick release at a cheap price in order to escape the pressures of their daily routine. The net cafe owner had developed a list with icons of the most popular sites, and uploaded the songs into folders, which were always present on the desktop. The practice of making these icons on the desktop is present in almost all the net cafes in the city to allow anyone to come in, click them, and pay an hourly fee to be entertained. These icons have only the image of a dancer to indicate the content of the folder and thus become the tools of desire and male agency.

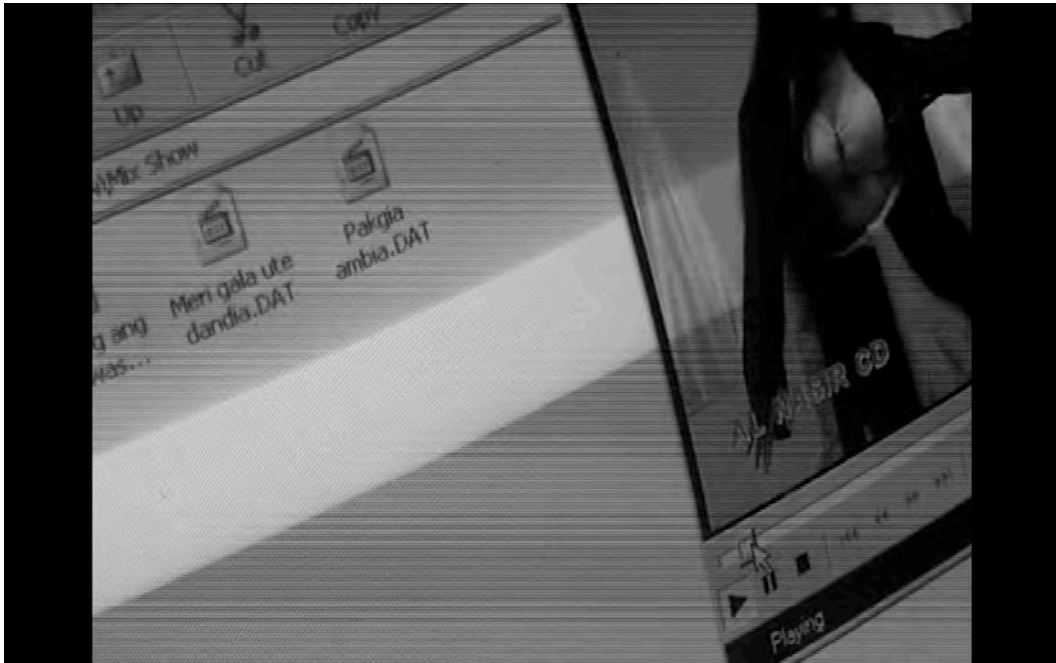


Figure 4.9 Folders and files on the desktop of a computer in an Internet Cafe in Shadbagh. I took this image in 2006.

My query to Shaukat, a shopkeeper in a small corner shop, was how people with a low literacy rate can maneuver easily between the technologies of Internet, mobile phone loading, and uploading movies/CDs. According to him, literacy is not important for finding entertainment on the Internet as everyone can do it by simply asking the net cafe owner about the desired site. He told me further that they charge 50 rupees for an hour and are not concerned about ‘what you are watching and what you are enjoying. They are only concerned with their business.’<sup>110</sup> The literacy rate, and especially the computer literacy rate, is not an obstacle to the pursuit of the ‘fulfillment’ of fantasies and desires on the net, or to watching digital technology. On this subject Kashif said, ‘some people from middle and lower middle backgrounds come to me. They are not literate but they definitely know what they want to see. They open the windows and go to the required folders and watch films of mujra dances and pornography’.<sup>111</sup> The ever-increasingly user-friendly technology enables these sexual pursuits. It has been very interesting to note

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<sup>110</sup> Shaukat. In an interview in 2010, Lahore.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

that in every locality of Lahore, people are very comfortable using mobile phones, downloading images and videos on mobiles, sharing the material, and going to net cafes to watch those materials. Hence, the digital and new media is a successful technique and tool of male sexual desire fulfillment in the face of illiteracy, economically disenfranchised existence, and rigid religious and moralist value system. These small distribution centers of material - mujra dance videos - play a significant role in the overall network of the parallel economy. When we examine newspaper reports, we find that these centers have replaced the old modes of VHS video centers, since the emergence of such centers in the social fabric is controlled by people's desires.

Common notions regarding the Internet's harmful effects on personal lives does not concern the shopkeepers or the producers. Instead, its impact on the sale of CDs and DVDs was a point of concern. The shopkeepers, who made a lot of money by selling sex scandal CDs and started the sex scandal genre, complained of the dire affects of the Internet on the sale of their businesses. The efficacy of digital media and the virtual space is certainly realized with vigor, something that is reflected in Kashif's explanation that 'now it's very difficult to ban this CD business. The net is too difficult to close down or control'.<sup>112</sup> He complained that the sale of the videos has gone down by fifty percent, and now the customers who come to buy these videos tell him that they can download all these videos easily from different sites that offer free downloads. For him, cable affected the market first, and then the Internet damaged it. The same Internet that was considered beneficial initially, for both free circulation and as a source of material from other international centers of distribution that could help in the local market, is now a point of concern since its accessibility has extended to the common consumer. It is difficult to ignore the resentment expressed by the shopkeeper towards a medium that has channelized the transfer of material from the international to the domestic sphere, eliminating the role of the distributor. Khalid Jutt and Mohammad Sher, as shopkeepers and producers,

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<sup>112</sup> Kashif. In an interview in 2010, Lahore

offered another interesting angle on the use of the Internet in the circulation and distribution of mujra CDs and porn films. For them, the CDs proved to be a very lucrative business. These shopkeepers, who started this business five years ago, now have three shops in the city. Like any other product, copyrights rules are ignored. The display of these videos in the shops is also quite intriguing in that they are openly available in the Hall Road market.

Although Kashif holds the Internet responsible for the downfall of his business, he also makes use of the Internet as a means of copying the movies and clips demanded by the customers, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. The circuits of mujra dance CDs operate on personal, local and international levels. Great challenges are posed by the fluidity and constant development of the technology. To deal with the constant changes in new media technologies, local people, market operators, and agents of the parallel economy, constantly invent ways to keep up with these challenges. So the circuits of oppositional modernity may appear to be disorganized and non-ideological, but they are certainly striving for their own survival within the capitalist system.

It is pertinent to examine some of the responses from the owners and/or workers of several net cafes that were visited during the field research. I mentioned earlier that net cafes are used in this analysis as centers of dissemination of mujra and porn videos, and as such I am not going to address the net cafe sex scandal category. Those are mostly available online on YouTube under the title of net cafe sex scandals. They are worth noting here primarily because the scandals have caused havoc in society, as a few girls who had been identified were tortured by their families, with one or two suicides and some fleeing the country. The raids of the police on some of the infamous net cafes have made most of the owners cautious and they are usually very careful in talking about their practices. It is noteworthy that when my assistant went to check the net cafes and surf the net, his casual discussions with the owners were quite informative, but when we later approached the owners and workers for an interview or a discussion they usually refused.

The level of comfort of net cafe owners is quite different from the shopkeepers of Hall Road. It is apparent that the security provided by the union at Hall Road gives the owners a sense of confidence that the cafe owners do not have, since they are scattered sporadically in different locations. This became more obvious when Jaan Haider, the owner of Jaan Net Cafe located in Gulshan Ravi (Jafaria Colony), doubted the intentions of our research. Initially he spoke to us very casually, but suddenly he became distrustful, saying that he didn't know us and we could be anyone disguised as students conducting research. This also referred to the present situation of the country, a distressful condition in which 'no one can be trusted these days'. For him it was the media people who initiated the report of net cafe sex scandals and caused such havoc in the country. Therefore, after answering a few questions, he refused to cooperate and referred us to another net cafe in the vicinity. A similar situation occurred when we tried to talk to Aamir Riaz, the owner of Adnan Net Cafe. The cafe is located in a middle and upper-middle class market, the Main Market Gulberg, and the cafe caters to students and the middle class. At first Riaz was quite interested but he later became quite concerned about where our material would be used, and even on our insurance that this content was not being televised he still refused to talk to us, and told us to go to another cafe nearby that had a porn data base.

Another experience that reflects the trends and ethics of the work environment was with the owner of the Web Star cafe, located in Gulshan Ravi (Moon Market). M. Zeeshaan, the owner of the net cafe, wasn't available and at first, his employee would not cooperate. However, in the following days he became more open towards us and started talking about his experiences. He observed that people of all ages came to their net cafe and most of them were from the working class. His observation was that people watch porn because they were frustrated and there was no other way of gaining access to cheap entertainment. He referred us to other net cafes in the area, which were not located in a busy public area. Net cafes that are located on busy plazas near offices, it became apparent, would attract more professional customers who wanted to use the Internet cafe for business



purposes. The ethics of usage and the environment of mainstream net cafes are different from cafes present in small plazas and markets.

Another cafe is in Abdali Chowk, Sant Nagar<sup>113</sup>, Lahore and the name of the owner is Kamran Malik. The café's interior is dark and the cabins are almost completely secluded from one another. The owner was polite and not highly educated, but he was able to understand the nature of our research. This last point was important, as it had turned out to be difficult to find people who could understand the nature of the research and were not suspicious. Mr. Kamran, after a casual introduction, was comfortable enough to speak about the topic openly. We discussed the research issues and the notions of masculinity and desire and how Pakistani society negotiates new media technologies. Then Kamran shared with us how he interacted with the customers who came to watch the explicit videos.

According to him, almost ninety percent of the customers' orientation was towards pornography. Many of them, after checking mails and other tasks, watch pornographic films, which are usually foreign, or in his words 'white flesh'. But the demand for local sex clips, scandals, and mujras was also there. It was very much in demand by the '*Paindoo* type customers'<sup>114</sup>, he stated by using this term for people exhibiting taste for pirated mixed plate forms of pornography, rather than western pornography. The observation at selected net cafes during the field research was that almost everyone watches these mujras and scandal clips in spite of categorizing the aesthetics of the two i.e. western porn as sophisticated due to its technological superiority and local videos as 'paindoo'. Kamran came across as a bold and unique individual who interacted with his customers and felt comfortable enough to share his responses from those interactions. He usually asked the customers about why they are indulging in these practices, and had been given many reasons, explanations, and points of view. But he told us that it's not just men who watch porn, but sometimes women come to use the Internet, watch porn, and indulge themselves too. However. the percentage

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<sup>113</sup> Comes under middle and lower middle economic classification.

<sup>114</sup> People belonging to rural areas with provincial aesthetic.

of females is very low however so the real issue remained about men and their desires.

The explanations, reasons, and observations made during these net cafe field research demonstrated that new media is an agency for males, primarily, in order to fulfill their sexual fantasies at these circuits of desire in public spaces. Several actors perform their agency on one level for sexual gratification, and on another level as a means to educate people for their sexual education and know-how. The range of uses of these sites in the net cafe includes; married people who are hunting for tips and positions to enrich their sex life; youngsters who are grappling with their sexual growth and the 'mysteries' of sex; and old people who are unable to perform their sexual practices and are confined to watch these sexually explicit materials to satisfy themselves. Lust was on the menu and they were serving. But due to being a pious Muslim, Kamran didn't approve of his own profession, and kept going back to the supreme ideals of being pure to put things in the correct Islamic manner. Constant negotiations with overarching religious values, notion of piety, and Muslimness were reflected in nuanced forms at these circuits of desire.

The experience with another cafe reinforced this understanding of the complex dichotomy present in the society. The Fast Net Cafe is located in Gulshan Ravi (Jafaria Colony) and is run by Mohammad Qasim. The owner of the net cafe was not available and his assistant was quite concerned about the 'true' motives behind the research questions. So he talked to Qasim, who told us that he didn't know much about the topic and suggested that we talk to the guy who was assisting him since he was more in touch with consumer-level public interactions. Initially, his assistant did not open up and was still concerned about the outcome of my research. After assuring him that this footage would not be shown to the public, he relaxed and started talking to us casually. He said that the presence of the male consumers is like fire to coal and once the coal is on fire it starts burning on its own. This discussion linked the consumption element of porn and mujra dance videos with the circulation in a way that showcased the net cafe centers of dissemination as

appearing to be non-active agents of sexually powerful consumers who are being facilitated.

The centers at Hall Road are active agents of desire, using digital technologies to maneuver and form the aesthetics of the consumers along with their own fulfillment, while believing they are producing only what people demand. On the other hand, the Internet cafes i.e. circuits of sexual desire, are catering to people's sexual fantasies by facilitating them according to their customer's requirements, including transgressing computer literacy, but are not involved in the forming of products. These net cafes act as an exchange between the product and the consumer, making the netcafe interior as new sites replacing traditional *kothas* for mujra dances.







Figure 4.10 Different Internet cafes in a low-income residential locality of Lahore.

## ***Section 2***

### ***Reviewing distribution and circuits of desire***

In this section, I first analyze the immense widespread of VHS and digital technologies due to relaxation in the import of VCR during Zia-ul-Haq's religious orthodox rule in Eighties which helped transform centers of media distribution and emergence of home video technologies catering to male sexual fantasies and desires. Those times in Pakistan were marked by severe social and political repression, which indirectly affected sexual expression and entertainment in the public sphere, resulting in the mushrooming of illegal and informal centers of videos. These energies of sexual desires were indications of the productive and non-coercive nature of such repressive discourses, as the state created an impression of piety and Muslimness as identity of Pakistani society, while people, on the other hand, as agents of their desire, negotiated for the fulfillment of their particular sexual desires. After analyzing the background of the spread of videos in Pakistan, I move to critically review the centers of distribution as networks of piracy and locate these circuits of desire through the theoretical framework of Brian Larkin and Ravi Sundaram.

#### **The Introduction of Public Morality and the VCR by Zia-ul-Haq**

On 18<sup>th</sup> April 1988, in the Urdu newspaper Mashriq, Nazir Haq wrote about the increasing number of video centers and VCRs:

Video centers are undoubtedly the hub of vulgarity. There is a flood of video centers in the country and they are running their business 'successfully' even in the most unfashionable impoverished locations....there is no need to have a permit or a license to open a video center. According to one survey in Lahore city alone there are around twenty five thousand video centers operating, half of which do not have licenses. They are operational because of the covert support of the police or some influential person, and are responsible for spreading obscenity.<sup>115</sup>

This report was published in the section of an Urdu newspaper, which highlights the current social problems in the country. Looking at this news

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<sup>115</sup> Haq, Nazir. Roznama Mashriq, 18 April, 1988, Lahore, retrieved from the archives of Daily Jang Lahore. Translated by the author.

item, it is sufficient to explain the widespread use and presence of video centers in the everyday entertainment of society. The widespread use of VCRs took less than four years to reach this level of presence, which was a direct result of the state's relaxed policy regarding the import of VCRs in Pakistan. The budget 1984/85 presented by Finance Minister G. Ishaq Khan under General Zia-ul-Haq's government allowed VCRs, which was reported as the main headline in one of the leading newspapers:

The end of interest based economy, privileges for middle class, raise in the import duty on cigarettes, import duty on VCR reduced and only two hundred rupees fee per annum will be charged, the tax exemption on the purchase of religious books,<sup>116</sup>

This elaborates the dichotomies of the state policies, which imposed religious indoctrinations through constitutional amendments and control on the media, while simultaneously approving the access of VCR and circuits of distribution of films, resulting in a mushrooming of videos centers for the fulfillment of illicit sexual desires. While cross-examining the main argument and looking at the infrastructure and the circuits of mujra dance videos through a historical perspective, I present the research findings to argue that, the results of the opening of so many video centers also shaped the contemporary digital culture of Pakistan. The present modes and means of distributing mujra dance videos is formed on the infrastructure developed two decades ago to circulate the material of the porn and pirated VHS videos in the city. The current centers of circulation and distribution of obscene material and mujra dance videos include: Internet cafes; plazas and small shops in the Hall Road and several other areas of Lahore; mobile repair shops where uploading and downloading such material is allowed at a very small charge; websites in terms of virtual spaces and shops; and the global market of *desi* diaspora in the form of export of CDs and DVDs.

These networks helped develop the parallel economy, (also known as the informal economy) in conjunction to a capitalist economy that supported

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<sup>116</sup> Daily Jang, 16 June 1984, main headline. Translated by the author.



copyrights and the legal import and export of materials<sup>117</sup>. Taking a lead from Gaughan and Ferman (1987), I articulate that the network of mujra videos emanates from the basis of human interaction. Certain societies are able to acquire the market economy model in absolute terms, but there are some societies that keep the two systems side by side simultaneously. The defiance of capitalist interests, in terms of using the original infrastructure for the transport of goods but using the pirated material for the underdeveloped, generate parallel economic cycles in the city, which is also called 'recycled modernity' by Sundaram (2010).

Reading the circulation of mujra dance videos in Pakistan in this way is to follow on the already existing model of Larkin who has established it as a unique model for a third world country. However, I also argue that circuits of desire are techniques of negotiations that allow sexual gratification on a mass scale in the face of a hardcore religious regime's control and a moralist society. The dichotomy present in this model has been discussed in the earlier chapter, but it is still pertinent to ask, that whether the pressure of the new forms of media, such as the VCR, was so strong that the military government gave in to the citizen's 'right' to entertainment? Or did the orthodox military regime want to gain public support as they had declared the year 1985 to be an election year after seven years of Martial rule, a long period in which severe Islamic injunctions were imposed? This contradiction in the state's apparatuses regarding social morality became obvious when two young sibling singers, Nazia Hassan and Zohaib Khan, the pop icons of

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<sup>117</sup> There are three schools of thought that articulate the informal economy. The first one, which comes from a legalist position, states that it is very difficult for a common and ordinary person to follow the legalities and formal processes, so they remain into the illegal realm, as claimed by Hernando de Soto. The second school's genesis is the Marxist Structuralists, and claims that the informal economy is a natural by-product of the capitalist economy. Because each capitalist firm/organization/company wants to maximize their profits they are compelled to bypass the labor laws, insurance requirements, and health coverage for their employees. So they opt for sub-contracting and contractual employment, which makes them supporters of the parallel economic structures in the third world (Chen 2006). And the third angle, which comes from a sociologist's position, claims that the basis of economy starts from human interaction and relationship and exchange. Gaughan and Ferman (1987).

the region<sup>118</sup>, appeared on Pakistani Television on 19th December 1984 and faced opposition from the religious circles for indulging in un-Islamic actions, such as dancing together on the PTV stage (please refer to Fig. 4.11). The PTV transmitted the song and dance performance of the siblings' band in several recorded shows in regular intervals during the twenty-four hour election transmission of the referendum<sup>119</sup> of Military dictator General Zia ul Haq. The appearance of this western-clad young pop band on PTV was used as a strategy to make sure that people remained inside their homes for entertainment while the government used bogus votes to declare the successful referendum<sup>120</sup>. This is important in the context of the Pakistani socio-political scenario where female newscasters and anchorpeople were forced to cover their heads whenever they appeared on air. One of the hostesses, Mehtab Rashdi refused to submit to rigid restrictive orthodox dictation and was consequently barred from PTV<sup>121</sup> for several years.

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<sup>118</sup> Nazia and Zoheb retrieved at 4:10 pm on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazia\\_and\\_Zoheb](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazia_and_Zoheb)

<sup>119</sup> *Referendum*, retrieved at 4pm on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2012. .

<http://storyofpakistan.com/referendum-1984/>

<sup>120</sup> *Referendum*. Story of Pakistan, June 2003. Retrieved on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2012 at 5:00 pm, Retired Air Vice Marshal Mohammad Yunus, stated in his talk in a private gathering that he was sent three ballot copies of the referendum election to be filled illegally, which he refused.

<http://storyofpakistan.com/referendum-1984/>

<sup>121</sup> Ahmed, Nauman. SZABIST colloquium: Musharraf was bad for TV, Zia was good. The Express Tribune, march 4, 2012, retrieved at 9:00pm on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2012

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/345138/szabist-colloquium-musharraf-was-bad-for-tv-zia-was-good/>



Fig. 4.11: Nazia Hasan and Zohaib Hassan. Disco Deewane (crazy for Disco) singing their record breaking pop song. Video screen shot from Vimeo.

### **Digital Technology, Infrastructures, and Centers of Desire**

These centers of desire are strategically designed to achieve political gain and sometimes spring from the pressing speed of new technologies that are fluid and infiltrate the societies, as I presented the case of VCR culture in Pakistani society. Larkin argues that the infrastructures placed by the government to regulate and control the flow of the economy sometimes produce its own 'corruption of communication infrastructure' (2008, 221). The fact that the VCR was promoted under the orthodox religious military rule illustrates the failure of the ideological state. However, the policy to promote took place either because of strategic vision or the lack of it, helping generate parasitic offshoots of the infrastructure that had been set up for other medias such as the TV and the film industry. Thus, we can see, for example, cable networks that operate with a license from PEMRA, the government regulating body, but also show pirated films, stage shows, and mujra dances with an outreach to the domestic sphere; the cinema halls transformed into stage theaters that host mujra dances in their stage dramas; and large film studios that used to be thriving places for shooting films, but which are now seldom used, and when they are used it is to shoot mujra

dance videos. The copying centers in Karachi can also be added to this list, since they started copying pirated films and have made a huge network throughout the country with Lahore being the second biggest center. These centers are thriving without giving any revenue to big corporations, but simultaneously, many local businesses are thriving and benefiting from these indigenous economic centers. The channels that direct the flow of video material and control their mass dissemination within the country also establish a global network, as in the case of Nigeria where pirated Indian films used to be couriered from Pakistan via the United Arab Emirates, as stated by Larkin (2008), and also from India to Karachi (Sundaram, 2010). The flow of the piracy network establishes it as a non-ideological parallel economic system, which knows no boundaries and thrives in the face of orthodoxy.

The infrastructure that allows media goods to circulate is very much the basis of allowing globalized media piracy operation to exist. Larkin explains the corruption of the infrastructures that help generate numerous possibilities for piracy. He states, 'it represents the potential of technologies of reproduction - the supple ability to store, reproduce, and retrieve data - when shorn from the legal frameworks that limit their application' (2008, 217). In the case of mujra dance videos, the database is huge. A few hundred films are produced each year. Some of them are constantly using the older clips along with the new ones to introduce a new video in which only one or two dances are actually new. The market for these videos is massive. Regardless of locality, they are available in every quarter from the up market areas to the most underdeveloped neighborhoods. Moreover, the international market of the Pakistani diaspora is also huge for these videos. Some of them are available through Internet, but people like to collect them as well. As is already discussed in detail in Chapter One, the shopkeepers informed me about the protection they were provided by the market's union leaders regarding the sale of illegal CDs. This is the prime responsibility of the elected union leader to let the shop keepers know if the police or media is

doing a raid.<sup>122</sup> Larkin discusses the notion of cities and social space through the framework of capitalism. He referred to Henri Lefebvre stating that 'cities take on real existence through their insertion into networks and pathways of commodity exchange, and it is networked infrastructure that provides these channels of communication' (2008, 219). The application of his argument is especially appropriate in the case of pornographic and mujra dance practices in Pakistan, as is evident from the infrastructures of the state and politics that help, indirectly, sustain the businesses at Hall Road.

Communication is possible through the constant circulation of goods, services, and storage on a massive scale, the process of which has been intensified with electronic communication in the present times (Ibid.,). The materials in the present research context would be the CDs and DVDs, and the goods are mujra dances and pornographic texts. The networks are fiber optics and the airwaves. The technology can be read as vehicles - the software and hardware combined together are vehicles. The storage of goods now takes place in digital media files, and most of the shops at Hall Road have their own hard drives to store all the videos that have been released and they are preserved, copied, distributed, and mixed with other international clips before the final sale. However, this does not guarantee that the archive of this huge database is present in any systematic or organized way. That is the reason that one finds many CDs from different shops with the same song and different dancers, and the reason that some of them are reproduced under one cover where as some of the same songs with the same dancers are released under another cover. The creative aspect of piracy of already pirated CDs circulates in the market, and as Larkin states, is part of everyday consumption, including repairing the broken down technology and generating new forms of 'economic structures where a large number of people are involved in the mending and correcting of the mobile phones, CD players etc.' and

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<sup>122</sup> I experienced resistance when I wanted to take a photograph of the market few years back and this year my male assistant faced the same when he wanted to take a camera out. We were able to take a snap of only those shops, which were permitted by their shopkeepers.

In many parts of the world, media piracy is not the pathology of the circulation of the media forms but its prerequisite... they show how the parallel economy has migrated onto center stage, overlapping and interpreting with the official economy, mixing legal and illegal regimes, uniting social actors, and organizing common networks.....self trained computer assemblers, copiers referred as recycled modernity by Ravi Sundaram'.(2008, 235)

The infrastructure that has originated because of the piracy and communication of new media technology helps many unskilled and illiterate or less educated people be a part of this informal sector. The acceptability of the infiltration of these commodities and its capturing of the city space is well documented and articulated in the works of Sundaram, and I offer a parallel penetration of these commodities in Lahore at the electronic markets of Hall Road and Hafiz Center where self-taught mechanics assemble, make, copy, burn, hack, download, web design, and repair electronics, mobile phones, and all computer-related technologies.

The material presented above in terms of net cafe culture and the circulation of mujra CDs is the logical consequence of global circulation of the images/films, 'whether experienced face-to-face at the most local level or over the Net' (Jenkins, 256). It showcases the fact that the whole notion of 'local' and 'global' in terms of copyrights and the legal copying and punching of DVDs have diffused into a fluid understanding of 'communal rights' to the entertainment. Kashif, the shop keeper at Hall Road added, 'I have come to know that in Karachi we used to have mega copying units where Chinese operators used to help in the reproduction of digital files, like songs, films, both national and international'.<sup>123</sup> He further elaborated on how they used to transfer those files from there to the international market. According to Kashif, during General Musharraf's rule, an attempt was made to regularize the piracy network. They wanted to impose a fifty percent tax on the legal duplication of these films, but the business people involved in piracy refused them on the grounds that it had not been the case for the previous thirty years and they would not start paying taxes now. Thus, the phenomenon of home units, which from CDs and DVDs made numerous copies, was initiated

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<sup>123</sup> Kashif in an interview in 2010 in Lahore.

in one shop,, encouraging the mass production of disposable CDs at a cheap price. It appears that copyright has not been an issue so far. To this, Kashif said that copyrights were always around and making illegal copies of films is inevitable. 'Of course if there are two CDs in the market and one is selling at the price of 300 Rupees and the other for 100 Rupees, the person who does not have money will buy the cheaper one, which is burned on the disc in an office or a shop'.<sup>124</sup> In developing markets, or so-called 'recycled modernities' to use Sundaram's term, it is a given fact that illegally copying and circulating is necessary to bring poor people in line with current trends of entertainment in the western world. But the simplistic equation of considering piracy to be an alternative to modernity is disregarded by Sundaram, as it is non-ideological in its political motivation. Larkin says that the 'focus on the mobility, innovation, and provisionality of piracy elides the fact that pirate networks are highly organized, and determined of other sets of relations' (2008, 226).

### **Circuits of Piracy**

The most interesting aspect of the distribution, circulation, and overall business of mujra dance CDs is the parallel practice of producer versus distributor. According to Larkin, 'in Nigeria the phenomenal rise in the video film industry has given birth to the 'novel form of reproduction and distribution that uses the capital, equipment, personal, and distribution networks of pirated media' (Ibid. 218). As such, the production taken up by the shopkeepers in Pakistan has not brought in the framework of legalities in the media, as they continue to occasionally feel pressure from state officials in the form of bans and police raids. Similarly, DJ Butt's guilt, which I discussed in the first chapter, makes him work more for religious causes. It has also become a subculture or alternate genre of entertainment linking to an old tradition of a very sophisticated dance form. These local media practices have gained currency and become substitutes for different forms of entertainment, including filmmaking, in the present day social milieu of the country. The new media technology allows the multiplication from an office

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

of a shop, and is a radical point of departure from the traditional methods of distribution in Pakistan and India (Sundaram, 2010).

Piracy and the violation of the copyrights of Indian and western films and songs do not comprise a major concern of investigation in this study. The piracy of songs from Pakistani films and their copyright violations does not confine itself to the local level. Instead, distribution of the pirated material is widespread without invoking any reaction from the producers and investors of the pirated Punjabi films. Altaf Bajwa, a lyricist of some of the songs that are used illegally in the *mujra* dance CD producers, stated to this query that, 'the Motion Pictures Act does not clearly delegate the copyrights of the songs to the producers of the film, and if it does' definitely the censor board is not concerned about its violation'<sup>125</sup>. But would the censor board itself be concerned, or should the affected party, the producer, take action? To get some clarification on this point I conducted a discussion with Ayesha Jawad, a copyright and intellectual property lawyer<sup>126</sup>. Her response to some of these issues was that there are laws regarding copyrights but there is a weak mechanism of implementation. Larkin's study demonstrates that digital technology itself provides a lot of freedom for circulation and mass production. The law controlling piracy of digital media follows the same format as that of print media, which means the ways of controlling the duplications and copies was much more controlled in the case of print.

The weakness of state in controlling piracy networks was evident by Jawad's statement, 'of course state is the silent observer'. She continued that the state knows about its severity but is unable to regulate it, fearing a downfall in the economy. The state's acknowledgement, by silence, of the parallel economy reflects the ambivalent relationship of the state and its governance (Larkin 2008, 220). For Larkin, the infrastructures or the lack thereof, in the third world brings frustration socially and politically among its citizens, which is recognized as a failure of the state. So the responsibility, in the present scenario, usually lies with the distributor of the material.

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<sup>125</sup> Bajwa, Altaf. In an interview with me in Lahore in 2010.

<sup>126</sup> Jawad, Ayesha. In an interview with me in Lahore in 2010.



Therefore, he becomes the main victim, or aggrieved person, and not the actual producer of the films. In terms of mujra dance CDs, as well as in the case of films from abroad, the distributor is responsible for appealing to legal authorities for its regulation. Ironically, the distributor who is affected, is also partially responsible for making pirated copies. Conveniently, the warning seal regarding violation of copyrights is also copied. Through the technological flow, warning sign enters consumers' space where this exchange is further accepted, as it also ensures it to be a part of contemporary information and trends only afforded by the First World economic structures.

In conclusion, I reiterate that the investigation of piracy networks in this chapter addresses the larger question regarding sexuality discourse, male desire, and the transformative digitized mujra dance forms and frame circuits of sexual desire within contemporary scholarship on South Asian and Pakistani media. In this chapter, I presented an examination of circulation and distribution networks, including video CDs' production and distribution in the shops at Hall Road, private cable networks, and Internet cafes. I argue that the creative network of piracy draws on new media and digital technologies and has helped to develop mujra dance videos as an informal industry. Drawing deeply from Brian Larkin's analysis of piracy networks and their circuits in Nigeria, I have established that in Pakistan, the piracy economy was not only a result of the forceful influx of the new media, but has its roots in the most orthodox religious military dictatorship during the decade of Eighties. It was shown with the evidence from newspaper reports of the time that military government supported the introduction of VCRs at subsidized prices in its budget while simultaneously supporting dissemination of religious textbooks. In such an environment, male desire uses its agency and successful techniques of negotiations with state and its authoritarian control, and most importantly, negotiated with issues of religious morality. It also addresses the question of the transformative aspect of new media including the Internet and video CDs as an alternative to the old tradition of mujra dances, whereby virtual space and Internet cafés are

the new sites of sexual practice and consumption. It is unique because it has helped to initiate a distinct form of the mixing and making mujra dance videos, and has thrived on the existing infrastructure of distribution. I illustrated that Internet cafes are another form functioning as center of circulation of the material, which are playing the role of the middlemen in linking the global with the local. It further links the local to an individual by devising modes to enable even computer illiterate people to tune into the latest trends and use the technology. Thus, the notion of literacy for personal entertainment is also defied by the user-friendly way the technology is being used. Therefore, to reiterate my main argument, these circuits of distribution of mujra dance videos and porn material offer us a model of oppositional modernity, which is non-ideological and disorganized. It is appropriate to link the argument presented in this chapter with the critical evaluation of production in the earlier chapter, noting that these very people succumb to personal gratification, and their discursive practices accept the presence of these sexually explicit materials. Piracy is supported for personal gains, and being non-ideological in nature, lends agency to people who otherwise would not be able to exercise their sexual expression. In that respect, I assert that mujra dance videos bring the public and the private spheres together in the manifestation of male sexual desire.

## Chapter 5

## Mujra Dance Videos: Consumerism and Narratives of Desire

This chapter analyzes the consumption of mujra dance video through the users' narratives of sexual desires. I argue that these narratives construct the popular perceptions of male desire. Following on the debates on the peculiar nature of new media technology, I have developed methodological strategies to understand the notion of desire, articulated as *mazaa* in this dissertation. These strategies have helped me gather and generate data to study consumers and their behavioral patterns and how they negotiate their desire in relationship to the desires of men from various classes, age groups, spaces, location, and gender. Two of the questions addressed in this chapter are: locating how do they understand their own desire, and how do they negotiate the complexities present in the notion of desire while negotiating their everyday life in present day Pakistani society? These broader questions triggered responses that reveal people's perception of other men's sexual fulfillment while they themselves continue to desire. It is in this realm of perception of desire of males that I analyze research interviews. I begin with a presentation of research methods developed to deal with issues of researching consumption of new media and male sexual desire and then I continue with an analysis formed on this theoretical framework.

The limitations to studying the consumption patterns of mujra dance videos can be articulated through a discussion of the nature of new media, and how the affects of this commodity are perceived within its sites of private and public consumption. In order to address the question of how to make sense of the consumption of new media, I refer to present scholarship on new media, which argues for developing new strategies from traditional media studies. The scholarship articulates new media's transitory nature. It argues that since this medium is not confined to cinema halls, therefore, applying ethnographic audience accounts and participatory observation only as methods is not

sufficient (Jenkins 2004, 34). According to Jenkins, new media does not mean a 'technological shift...alters the relationship between existing technologies, industries, markets, genres and audiences' (Ibid.). Specifically, I argue in this chapter that, mujra dance videos are a desirable new media product, which regularly changes hands and that in this exchange, the form transfers from one media to another, within the sites of public circuits and with a promise of private spaces in order to fulfill desire and fantasies. The consumption of mujra on stage shows has transformed to CDs and digital mode, which are also viewed on cable in the privacy of homes alone or with families, in Internet cafes with private cabins and computer screens both at home and offices. The public-cum-private Internet cafe space where mujra dance videos and porn clips are available from the net, and the open markets on Hall road and other streets of Lahore, offer the option of downloading clips on mobile phones at a very low price. Thus we see several modes of media transformations. These products are transported through technologically evolving circuits, transcending non-literacy of many consumer and legal infrastructures. The nature of consumption in the stage halls during live mujra shows is significantly different in its nature from the same mujra dances scrambled into a CD format, which are then distributed through the shops. These products are often bought along with aphrodisiac products to enhance pleasure in the privacy of their spaces. The Internet cafes pose another kind of consumption, in which consumers share the larger space together with other Internet cafe goers, but are confined within the fabricated wooden paneled cabins that offer some privacy. This mix of private and public forms a unique mix of consumers, which requires a complete in-depth reading of the consumption patterns, behaviors, relationship of consumers with the space and technology, and more.

To fully comprehend the changing patterns in the consumption of these mujra videos and to understand what happens when they actually watch the dance, it would be appropriate to conduct a study with multiple methodological approaches, which include surveys, participatory observation, and most importantly the psychoanalysis of the content and the consumerist behaviors. Moreover, desire is constructed through their fantasies and through

the objectification of dancers, which then enables the user to consume their object of desire in their private space. It is these directions that Jenkins pointed earlier; saying new media requires new understanding of the nature of consumption (2004). Since the present research aims to address questions about mujra dance videos as an emblem of new media in present day Pakistani culture and understand male desire, I point out the above limitations as a larger methodological problem. These are not addressed in this chapter since they are outside of its scope. Therefore, I have chosen interview method to analyze narratives of males regarding their perception of sexual desire.

As previously stated, this chapter analyses and explores the narratives and accounts presented by the consumers of mujra dance videos. I use the term 'consumer' in its broad sense to refer to the users and viewers of mujra dance videos, who devour and consume, even when merely gazing at the mujra dance while the video production is taking place. The consumption of new media is described by Jenkins as the 'sites of tension and transition shaping the media environment' (2004, 33), which I have used in this chapter to further my understanding of the term. I argue, by using this term, that the consumers are active agents of their desires, and they pursue their desired object with consciousness while dealing with the complexities present in the discursive practices. The argument presented by Schor in her consumer critique of twentieth century debates, that producers have a 'growing role in the production of cultural innovation' (2007, 28), is relevant in positioning the consumption versus the production of mujra dance videos. The producers of mujra videos are first consumers of their own desires and then producers of a product for the fulfillment of male desire. That quest for fulfillment, I note here, traps producers in the continuous cycle of desire, which is never satiated and never fulfilled. The producers are active agents of their desire, creating a parallel market economy, financially beneficial, and sexually gratifying.

During my research, I became conscious of the persistent intervals in discussions with informants regarding their desire, where they initially hesitated, sometimes smiled, laughed, or sometimes appeared bewildered. The fact that the informants found it easy to talk more openly about the desires of

others is something I used as a strategy to understand the discourse of erotica that uses indirect means and idioms to refer to oneself. It is similar to Mankekar's reading of female desires of consuming a commodity which she termed as commodity affect, meaning desire to acquire and sometimes, only to gaze at the desired commodity (2010, 424). The discussions with interlocutors revealed erotic desire but layered by their perception of fulfillment of desires of other males belonging to a different class. These perceptions become fantasies through which 'we learn to desire' (Zizek, 1989, 118) and male perceptions of others' desires and fantasies as a manifestation of their own desire is expressed through the idiom of power and the gender binary (Mankekar, 2010). The informants I interviewed belong to diverse socio-economic backgrounds, age, locations, class structures, gender, and religion, primarily living in the city of Lahore. These narratives of consumption are shared without much articulation of their own desires and practices in private, keeping in view the gender relationship of the researcher with the informants. The 'yearnings for commodities', to use Mankekar's term, were signaled during the narration of these accounts of the informants during my field research when they explained the inability or inaccessibility of abundant sexual intercourse as a justification for consuming the mujra videos. These unfulfilled desires, due to both social and economic reasons, has left the informants with mere gazing and consuming of the CDs, which is a 'pleasure' in itself and is close to what they describe as the erotic desire of others (2010, 424). I analyze the following narratives of desire structured against the theoretical framework of new media audience consumption strategies and negotiations, superimposed with informants' perception of fulfillment of desires.

### ***Mujra Videos and Narratives of Desire***

During my research, I interviewed consumers from Shadbagh in the north of Lahore, Model town, Johar Town, Iqbal Town, Mall Road, Samanabad, Gulshan-e-Ravi, Gulberg, Defence, Cantt, Muslim Town, and Garden Town, which comprise a wide range of lower middle class to posh residential areas of Lahore (please refer to Fig. 5.1 for locations in Lahore). References to these will come more often through the discussion of interviewees in the main text.

There are several shops located in these areas of Lahore, along with the presence of cable TV in households that transmit live mujra dances in stage shows, and in addition to these. There are networks of Internet cafes catering to male fantasies and desire. Presentation and display of the mujra videos changes from one location to another, as I investigated in the previous chapter, but the contents of the videos are more or less the same all over the city. Through discussion with the interviewees, I articulate that, the taste and perception of the consumers change in aesthetics from low-income area to posh residential area, but the genres remain the same in all parts of the city. The age range of the interviewees was from 18 – 60 years. It also included three women. Initially I will examine the notion of desiring mujra dances by positioning groups' discussion. Then I will focus in detail on different issues and significant aspects including aesthetics, class, location, and age that emerged in discussions with these groups as well as other informants.





Figure 5.1: Different neighborhoods of Lahore. D.H.A means Defence Housing Society, commonly known as Defence.

Finding consumers who were willing to talk about their consumption was the most difficult part of the field research. My assistant helped me locate a few people, while I networked through friends. During my research I came across some of the consumers, who then helped me enter their groups for research. A discussion with a government official in the customs department at the Lahore Airport, and two other businesspersons of middle range socio-economic class took place in the office of a lawyer behind Diyal Singh Mansion off Mall Road. The place was selected because two of the participants were residents of the apartments located behind the office. Mohammad Aslam works in custom clearance at the dry port in Lahore. He is a middle-aged man with a family living in Ghazi Abad. Mohammad Shehbaz is his colleague and is considered *usataad* (master) by the rest of the group of friendly colleagues, because they trust his worldly skills. Malik Abdurrahman works as an importer and exporter of goods. The group used to regularly watch theater and mujra dances. This group consumed mujra dances live on stage and then shifted to mujra videos CDs along with the mediums changing shape.

Abdul Rehman, talking about what they desire to see in mujra shows, said, 'people who go to the theater are interested in watching these dances and the songs. They are not interested in the dialogues or the story of the play, if there is any. Even the dialogues have the same vulgar content'<sup>127</sup>. The initial discussion started with using the word 'people' and how 'they' desire. To talk about mujra dances consumption and desire, and not using first person voice, especially if the researcher is female was the most common aspect of communication which was addressed methodically in this chapter. Having distance in verbal communication offers ease to the interviewees so then they can easily talk 'objectively' about desiring mujra dances for its particular reasons. This explanation about mujra dances in the stage shows hints at the efficacy of having mujras in each stage show, which marks its popularity. The regular mujra dance consumers consider the dialogues of these stage shows

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<sup>127</sup> Rehman, Abdul. In an interview in Lahore, 2010

obscene. The dialogues of the play usually downplay male sexuality, as I examined earlier, and it is for this reason that this group considers them vulgar. When they mentioned the dances, the notion of vulgarity does not enter their vocabulary, but it is about dancers seducing men. Aslam, Rehman's friend, intervened by saying, 'the songs are made to attract men. Naseebo Lal will sing only such songs that will seduce any man, for instance, *meri hik te qatra khilo giya*' (Literally means, 'a drop stayed on my hip'). The statement referred to men as passive consumers who are left at the mercy of the producers and seductresses. To be seduced is natural, which is further illustrated by the statement, 'when the songs are written for seducing the men, then of course we will feel seduced'. It is also about the power of consumption, where the object of desire, a commodity, glares seductively at the buyer/consumer and creates a seduction affect.

The question of the consumption of dancers/mujra dances is a complex one. I asked them about their preferred dancer/s and what about their particular choice that makes her special for them. To this, they all said laughingly, with side-glances at each other, 'If we get a chance then whatever is available. If there is no opportunity then of course we can't say anything'. This statement shows random choices and multiple options available for the promised fulfillment of the sexual desire of the consumer, who is ready for seduction. The readiness of the consumer starts at the point where choices are not important, but the availability is of supreme concern. This statement supports producer Khalid Jutt approach for random selection of mujra dancers in that they don't really care about the type of a dancer, as long as she is ready to expose her body. The producers are aligned with the consumption pattern of sexual desire.

The other colleague, Shehzad, was a fan of Nargis. For him, her dance technique was better than the other dancers. He then commented on how the two sisters, 'Nargis and Deedar are known for their dances', whereas, he said with scorn, 'dancers like Saima Khan are known for exposing themselves'. However, after much discussion he said, 'Well, of course there is a difference. Everyone has her own style. Nevertheless, if the song is good, and the face is

pretty, then I feel like I fancy her. If the dance is not synchronizing with the music, even then it is not a problem.' I wondered what it is that makes one fancy a dancer if she is not a good dancer. Is it her face or the seductive lyrics of the song she is dancing to that transforms the experience from simple watching to seduction? The ambiguous hints of desire for women signals a consumer who desires but is not ready to take responsibility of their desires. Being fully aware of the gender divide, I wondered whether my presence was causing them to act as passive consumers, who are admitting their desire to boast their sexuality, but do not want to take responsibility for their desires. When I look at the text written under mujra videos on YouTube in the next chapter, I investigate the freedom men feel in expressing their desire in a virtual space, which is not controlled as the physical space. It is the same technique of negotiations in which men want to keep a safe way out for them to survive in the socially and religiously restrictive society. Constantly traversing between desire and piety, it is the best strategy employed for the fulfillment of sexual desire and keeping a moralist face.

I asked a similar question during another group discussion with Chauhdry Shaukat Rehman and his friends. Rehman is a general utility storeowner located in a low-income area at the corner of an alley on Multan Road opposite Shahnoor Film Studios. In this area there are many dance and music academies due to the presence of film studios. I conducted the interview in the studio of a *Heejra* (transvestite) dancer named Pinky. I asked the group what exactly they want to see in the mujra dance, and if they imagine the dancer as a woman they desire and fancy or strictly as a dancer. Predictably, in the beginning of the discussion, their comments straightforwardly signaled the position of a moralist consumer. Shaukat said of his favorite dancer, Nargis, 'this it is their bread-earning job'. For him, the fact that she is a professional dancer who is out there to seduce was a simple fact. Thus, I assume, they were also a bit bewildered as to why I wanted to really explore the nuances of their desire. Therefore, I then asked about what they think when they see them dancing. Do they feel any pleasure? I had to use the terms *mazaa*, *lutf*, and *aish* (different words in Urdu and Punjabi meaning pleasure) to rephrase my

question in number of ways. Eventually Shaukat replied, 'of course if one likes it only then one likes to continue to watch these dances. Otherwise one can always change the channel'. The nonchalant way he expressed this was not at all unusual for answers about the issues of desire, which I assumed were coming due to the methodological issues I argued earlier. I asked what exactly they want to see in the mujra dance; if they imagine the dancer as desirable woman, or if they watch her in the strict sense of a dancer? Shaukat replied, "Quite obviously this is not a work of an ordinary woman. This is a professional work for a dance." He continued to say that whenever he is watching the dance, he is aware that she is very much into this business and is alluring men towards her charms because she is paid to do that. The Punjabi phrase, *o te ohnda kam hai* (this is her job), was a straightforward explanation regarding dancers profession and ethics, and did not answer my inquiry regarding male desire or fantasy for a particular dancer. Since men are not used to explaining the nuances that constitute desire, they are probably more interested in experiencing the desire, while the notion of desire amongst men is understood in such simple and obvious terms that it is hard to articulate the several layers that constitute desire. If the present thesis were only about the consumption of mujra dance videos, then I would have spent more time devising a multi-approach research methodology. The later section of this chapter shows how the conversations became more comfortable once everyone started talking about the desire of other males.

Shehbaz is twenty-nine years old, works in the IT business, and recently got married. He is another person who regularly watches mujras on CDs. I arranged a meeting with him and his three close friends late afternoon in a public park to discuss informally their interests and likes, as well as their position on mujra dances. I already knew one of his friends as my student, who had introduced him and other friends to my research. Shehbaz explained the desire for dancers in mujras by saying, 'the dancers knows how to incite men, and how to show breasts and the back and front of the body, the movement and the glimpses of the flesh are the highlights'. He was initially reluctant to explain what he likes, but once he felt comfortable among his friends' company

he started to explain the body parts as separate entities from the whole body. For him, a regular user of mujra videos, the continuous display of the body parts of his object of desire in a predictable manner pleases him. His statement resonates with the seminal study of masculinity and desire by Griffin, who shows how the pornographic image becomes part of the way men construct their reality so that women are objectified (Griffin, 101). The idea that a particular dancer has revealed a glimpse of her body for the first time on stage will remain there in the minds of male consumers even though there are many more after Saima Khan who have gone even further with explicit gestures. The dancers for him are reduced to the objects of his desire, which he fancies whenever and however he pleases.

At a common meeting place at Mochi Gate, one of the gates of the walled city of Lahore, a group of young men, between the ages of 25 and 35 years, regularly meet to hang out together. The discussion with this group primarily addressed the notions of desire and male fantasies, along with an elaborate discussion about culture, religion, and sexuality. A very animated group, they felt at ease when they were talking about their perception of sexual frustrations prevailing in the society. On the question of fantasy, one of the people commented that, 'every one has some fantasy. I was just talking to friend. I asked him that what you like about women? His response was he liked chubby women, where as he is slim himself'. This person while narrating the fantasy of his friend was shocked to know that this man had this 'imperfect' fantasy, whereas, he preferred a perfect fantasy. While desiring women, what one desires is not a rational decision as we have already seen, but mostly based on the impulse of desiring, devouring, and consuming an object, which offers or promises satiation. This fulfillment, however, never occurs, which explains why we continue to desire. The realm of fantasy, or to be precise, a complete fantasy, was important for one person because it rendered an escape from reality. The objecting friend continued to comment on the 'imperfect' fantasy, saying, 'if you don't want a perfect mix in your fantasy, like face of some model, body of another actress, then what is the point of having a fantasy. I have a fantasy like a normal person, who wants perfection'. The notion of

having a 'normal' fantasy does not entertain the idea of an individual's indulgence into a realm of fantasy that caters to his own sexual desires. Another friend commented that as far as mujra videos are concerned, people want cheap entertainment. He said, 'pornography videos frustrates more and *paindoo* (people living in villages exhibiting their peculiar rural aesthetics are called with this term) people like to go to theater because it is cheap and they can afford only that'. Then he corrected himself as, 'but the front row in the theater is expensive. People who go and watch mujra are *tharkee*' (flirts/womanizers). This is a common notion to designating live theater performance consumers as *paindoo* with cheap provincial tastes.

In a discussion, the group commonly agreed that people like escape. There are frustrations. When people see so much porn and other videos in video centers and net cafes, it compels them to do something physically, like rape, harassment, or domestic violence. How violence enter the realm of mujra dance videos sensibilities was quite fascinating, because one is yet to see the relationship of violent sex and rape associated with the use of these, or any implicit violence represented in these videos. Although violence becomes part of the production process, it is hard to see directly on the final videos. In the presence of many porn rape genre videos in the market, people associate their desire with a romanticized notion of love and seduction, but nonetheless, they are affected by the presence of such violent imagery associated with fulfillment of sexual desire. I argue this point later in the discussion of class and sexual desire in which justification for the consumption of mujra dance videos is closely linked with the inability of a poor man to conduct rape for fulfillment of his sexual fantasy of abundant sex.

The significant point that I inferred was that, for all the interviewees, mujra is important in present times as a promise to fulfill sexual fantasies. According to Murtaza, who was one of the consumers I interviewed, 'mujra videos fulfill to a large extent desires'. The actions of the dancer on stage and otherwise in the videos are explicit. They reflect the ideal dream state, 'that this is how I am going to react if you experience sex with me'. Therefore, he continued, 'in a society where adultery is not allowed and we cannot indulge in

free sex openly, so mujra is good. We entertain our self, get satisfied, no release as such and also no loss of power'. Murtaza statement reflected the mass appeal of mujra due to its availability and reach to common people, primarily made possible due to changing form and medium such as CDs, mobile downloads and Internet, which are very cheap. On the other hand, the original mujra dance performances during Mughal times were considered very sophisticated, and only the elites could afford and access them. Now anyone who can afford the low price of a ticket can watch a live mujra. Since Mughal times, due to many factors and passing of significant time, mujra has transformed into activities that is available on the Internet, cable TV, and CDs, and live at small weddings, parties, and stage shows. The popularity of mujra with the ordinary is analogous. The ill effects of the dance are felt more recently in the media, precisely because of its larger consumption by the low income and low status groups, which makes this practice vulnerable to everyone's criticism, whereas the upper class indulgence of mujra dances is accepted without much chagrin.

### **Location: the socio-economics of desire**

In this section, I will analyze discussions among several groups on the issues of location and aesthetics of mujra dance and desire. As I mentioned earlier, one group included Mohammad Aslam, Mohammad Shahbaz, Malik Abdur Rehman, and Shahid Awais gathered in an office located in the main commercial center of the city off Mall Road and near the High Court. The buildings' condition and the residents living around this area did not give much of an impression of wealth. The building belonged to Hindus and Sikhs before partition and now these are under the control of the Evacuee Trust Board, so the rent is not very expensive. The office was a small dark room with the only source of light coming from the door, which was also partially blocked because some of their other friends joined our discussion and stood in the doorway. Since they all belong to the working middle class, their insight into the taste of the consumers of mujra dances helps suggest the socio-economic dynamics of aesthetics. As an example, here is a comment by Mohammad Shehbaz:

Mostly people from low economic backgrounds have such tastes and they enjoy a lot in the sexually explicit materials. Whereas, the middle class is a little reserved in their enjoyment and entertainment, and upper class does not like these mujra because open and free life style is part of their daily routine.

This resonates with Kashif's (the shopkeeper) understanding of sexuality and its aesthetics in several classes. According to Kashif, a man living in Defence (an upscale residential area in Lahore) has so much money that he is in a state of enjoying perpetual mujra. By that he meant that a man living in Defence has access to all kinds of sexual entertainment so he does not need to watch these mujra CDs, or lower himself to artificial modes of enjoyment because he is able to achieve real 'fulfillment'. It is very interesting to note that this perception that men from Defence are able to fulfill their desire is based on their observation of men and women intermingling on streets and in cafes in a much more relaxed and open manner. The fact that many younger females in these areas are wearing jeans and trousers with tight tops signals their free sexual lifestyle. The similar kind of western fashion was used in Saturday Night Mujra series, and in some other forms of mujra where dancers are also shown clad in tight jeans wearing tank tops or skimpy clothing. When men living in conservative locations see males intermingling with females in public space, they perceive them as having a perpetual state of sexual fulfillment - an ideal sexual fantasy for many. This also determines for them to believe that the aesthetics of men from such up-scale localities disregard mujra dances. What I argued before about desire and the fantasized notion of fulfillment, which is never fully achieved or fulfilled, is expressed here through the articulation of desire and class privileges. The males belonging to lower and middle economic groups believe that the sexual desires of certain rich people are fulfilled and that they thus find satiation, whereas middle and lower class groups continue to struggle for their sexual fantasies.

I present here now an interaction with a person who lives in Defence and interacts with people belonging to upscale socio-economic groups. Salman Zafar<sup>128</sup> is a media director at one of the major media corporations in Lahore.

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<sup>128</sup> Zafar, Salman. 1st December 2010, in an Interview at a cafe in Defence, Lahore.



In this capacity he is responsible for organizing, hosting, and attending parties in the entertainment world with wealthy people. He is thirty-three years old, and was a foundation year student at the National College of Arts in 1998 when I started teaching at that institution. I met him again by chance. Upon sharing notes, he became very interested in my research topic. He considered my research topic important for Pakistani cultural understanding as it poses questions on the notion of sexuality and particularly masculinity. He told me that he would like to discuss these issues in detail, and how he had been reflecting on them because of his close contacts both through his job as well as his personal preferences. During our formal meeting in an upscale cafe in Defence, I asked about the consumption of mujra dances among the elites and wealthy people of the city. I was particularly interested to know the modes through which consumption takes place, and also if their aesthetic is different from consumers living in other localities. Zafar<sup>129</sup> told me that, although people who are living in Defence are more upscale and sophisticated, the desire remains the same. He told me that they are bigger consumers of mujras than anyone else. 'There is no limit to *ayyashi*' (pleasure seeking), he said. He further classified the consumption pattern and aesthetics in the elite groups. The high classes enjoy watching these mujras live, they don't like the CDs. However, within the same economic groups, the 'nouveau riche' still carry their middle class values. They are the ones who still buy these CDs and enjoy watching them along with their close friends.

An interesting insight into the class structures through the lens of desire links people who sit at *dhabbas* (tea stalls), such as truck drivers and manual workers, with businessmen belonging to Shah Alam market but who have shifted their residence to Defence. The division, according to Zafar, was very straightforward. The elites, which also include the educated and professional classes, do not go to theaters to watch live mujras. They go to fashion shows and after parties instead. If there is a mujra performance in a wedding party then they all appreciate and enjoy it together. During these parties, it is a show of wealth. The dancer is showered with money while she is

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<sup>129</sup> Zafar, Salman. 1st December 2010, in an Interview at a cafe in Defence, Lahore.

dancing, which is usually a prompting gesture by the person who is showering money, that the dancer should move closer to him and do suggestive dance moves, including touching his lips, or letting him insert the money in her blouse. These live mujra dances among the elites also include female audiences, who may or may not be enjoying the dances fully. The preference of this group is based on quality. To fulfill the requirements of the elites' tastes, dancers these days are sent to Arab countries especially for training in belly dancing. In Dubai they also learn Indian dance from special training schools.

Zafar further continued that they have pool parties at home, where they serve very lavish food. Some of them participate in those parties, and sometimes their wives are also present, though sometimes it is not their wives but their girlfriends, as they like to appear in public with their wives even though everyone knows if they have other girlfriends in private. Regarding choice of singer, the elites enjoy Punjabi songs if sung by legendary singer Noorjahan. Naseebo Lal is considered too cheap for the elites' taste. Zafar's detailed account of the elite's tastes and practices were similar to what I have explored through the videos uploaded on YouTube with titles *VIP private mujra party*. These videos which are quite large in number, display the patterns of enjoyment and audience reactions to female dancers. The tall, slim women with golden-streaked hair, adorned with Arabian style jewelry and wearing harem-style trousers or skirts that reveal whole length of the legs, and short blouses with glittery embroideries and diamanté's, present the figure of a glamorous and seductive female. The music is usually contemporary Bollywood, or some very popular Pakistani songs, although very rarely Punjabi songs. This also explains why at the times of bans on Naseebo Lal's songs by the Lahore High Court, the well-connected elite groups did not really react against the ban. Firstly, they were not affected, and secondly, because their aesthetics look down on this level of dancing and singing.

It is important to distinguish here the changes in viewing dance moves and the aesthetics of the songs that suggest the tastes of a particular class. The most popular Punjabi songs will only be understood by Punjabi speaking people and especially by '*Gujjar*' (a caste which is considered rural in

taste that deals with cattle farming). Gujjars are also the major financiers of Punjabi films, which explain why the titles of numerous films in Punjabi are named after some Gujjar *badmash* (scoundrel). Faisalabad's sheikh community, which is mostly in business, is quite famous for mujra dances. I asked the group of people from Scheme Mor, Multan Road, to what extent people like to watch these mujra videos in this area. Shahid Awais replied, 'Lahori people enjoy dance more where they also enjoy the *jugat* (jokes) whereas viewers from Faisalabad and Pindi enjoy only the sex part. They don't care about the dance and the songs'. According to Shaukat Rehman, who was a shopkeeper opposite Shahnoor Studios, , 'some of them are religious; they go home and have beards. And probably they watch these in their own rooms'. Since cable TV and Internet is available everywhere, usage, and indulgence in these mujra dances is widespread, regardless of the tastes, values, and location of one's residence. In another interview I conducted in a net cafe in Shadbagh<sup>130</sup> (please refer to Fig. 5.1) the owner of the cafe and his friends expressed their views of the trends and sexual practices of people in different areas of Lahore, but specifically in their own area. He told me that after people finish their work at factories they come straight to the Internet cafe. This is a way for them to get some release by watching some mujra CDs on the net and to get some entertainment before going home. He said that, 'they are not like 'liberal', 'modern' and rich people who do not need to watch these videos'. When I asked what he meant by this statement, he replied, 'In the upper class they sit together with their girl friends, therefore, they don't feel sexually frustrated'. In his perception, males from upper class are sexually fulfilled and do not feel 'sexual repression' that he felt was prevalent in his locality.

The perception of sexually fulfilled males from upper classes is also reflected in more crude terms in another interview with a Mujra CD shopkeeper, Kashif. This was the first time I had heard a glimpse of resentment in Kashif's tone, who while explaining the sale, consumption etc. always

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<sup>130</sup> Shadbagh is located at the top center of the map. One can see the distance between the two localities: Defence, a posh locality is situated at the bottom side of the map; Shadbagh, is a residential area in the north of Lahore where mostly factory workers lives.

maintained that he does not like to indulge in these materials. Suddenly raised his voice and exclaimed, 'what about the poor man? He cannot even rape a woman?' He associated his weakness for not committing rape as a social weakness because of the dire consequences with police. Violence is justified as resentment for the privileges of males in the upper elite class, where they associate fulfillment of desire with plenitude. The fact that rape was justified on the grounds of poverty and unavailability of sexual pleasure became ironic when he further elaborated that 'the poor man has only his wife'. To this, I asked whether he thinks rape is an expression of fulfilling one's desires. He replied, 'No, no, that's not what I am saying...the rape is to show one's manliness, strength. To tell people that look, I am so resourceful person and I can get away with anything.' Kashif's statement shows the imagined liberation of sexual expression of the upper class, who he pictures having sex in plenitude outside one marital relationship. This resonates with Foucault's idea that,

By creating the imaginary element that is 'sex', the deployment of sexuality establishes one of its essential internal operating principals: the desire for sex – the desire to have, to have access to it, to discover it, to liberate it, to articulate it in discourse, to formulate it in truth. It constituted 'sex' itself as something desirable (1978, 156)

By positioning the two different perceptions side by side, from two socio-economic class groups regarding the viewing of mujras, I argue that people like to watch these mujra dances in every corner of the city. The only difference is that the elites can afford to conduct them more regularly at their private parties according to their tastes and the changing popular trends of Bollywood songs, and don't have to resort to merely viewing them on digital screens. These elite groups appeared to be consumers of mujra dances, whereas people belonging to other social and economic classes are able to manifest, represent, manipulate, and construct their desire in a much more complex way. Males belonging from different locations perceive the fulfillment of desire differently. Their indulgence is a defiance of social structures, economic restrictions, religious values, and gender power plays. For the perception of some, the mere

company of female friends satiates sexual desire and fulfillment, whereas others perceive violence as a necessary expression for achieving fulfillment of the abundance. Despite the difference in the perception of desire and its fulfillment by males in different localities of Lahore, the field research maintains that such volcanic sexual desires engulfing the large portion of society has emerged during the last few decades partly due to the presence and user-friendliness of new media technologies.

### **Space and desire**

I have previously mentioned my meeting four men, including Shaukat, in the dancing studio of Pinky, a *heejra* (transvestite). Those four men, who were in the business of hiring and supplying mujra dancers, were sitting with Shaukat in a dark room without any windows and with minimum essentials. It had a plain plastic sheet on the floor, some clothes hanging by the wall and a poster or two on the wall marking the interior decoration of the studio. One of the friends, nicknamed Micky, works on stage with all the major mujra dancers, and Khalid Mehmood works as an organizer of dance shows in the nearby villages and local areas. The discussion with this group highlighted the domestic space and the public space, like Shaukat's small general store with a TV playing mujra dances. The notion of fantasy while watching these videos in homes with and without the presence of the family needs to be placed against the public and collective watching of these mujra dances at *dhabbas* (small tea and food stalls) and other shops. The location of this studio for the people who were present in the discussion was ideal for their sexual desires and fantasies. Shahnoor Studio is located on the main road opposite Pinky's studio where many mujra dance videos are recorded, both for Punjabi films and Hall Road producers. I recorded Saima Khan's performance in this studio. According to the group, many people simply go to the studio and other gardens, like *Malik Wala Bagh* Park, to see dancers' performances and witness the exposure to their bodies live.

Watching mujra videos within the domestic space is a normal practice due to the many private channels on cable TV networks in Lahore and other large cities and small towns in Pakistan. The basic underlying

understanding generally is that these are not programs to be viewed with families. The problem for them arises only when the whole family is sitting and watching these programs together, which means mostly women, like sisters or mothers. One of the friends of Shaukat stated, 'If one is all alone and suddenly one sees a channel showing Saima<sup>131</sup> dancing on stage so definitely it gives pleasure and satisfaction'. For him, watching mujras on TV at home means being exposed to a wide spectrum of dancers, but if Saima is on some channel then it completes the fantasy. About privacy he explained, 'I guess, the idea is to enjoy the pleasure in the isolation when one is completely engaged with oneself without the fear of any obstruction from outside world'. The imagination is free in the unobstructed environment. By isolation he means being with himself, not even in the company of his wife. This statement reflects the power of fantasy, which starts operating once in isolation. That isolation causes the person to be engaged with the performer and to identify himself to fulfill his fantasies in state of scopophilia (Mulvey, 1975).

People watch these dances in a family setting, but these are not considered vulgar. The notion of what is vulgar and what is not vulgar is still difficult to define in an absolute manner. In the real settings, when a dance is seen in and around a family setting it is considered sober enough, while it becomes more vulgar with seclusion. When it is exclusively for men the dancers take their clothes off. In some of the mujra videos during rural weddings, as shown on YouTube, women are seen enjoying the same dances that men watch, by sitting behind males or behind the veil. In the domestic space, the cable operator do not observe any time slot or provide warning signs before playing the mujra dances on their channels. What amounts to exclusively male time is not the time factor, but the space of where and how the males indulge in viewing these dances. If a group of males were entertaining themselves in a place devoid of family, then the same program would be entertaining. I also wanted to know how males react to women watching these mujra dances. I asked Shaukat's group if they were aware of women watching these cable TV mujra shows in the absence of males.

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<sup>131</sup> Saima Khan is the same dancer that I have used images of in a shooting of a dance in the first chapter.

Shaukat's response was, 'I cannot make any statement on this, but probably women from the domestic sphere do not watch these dances. Only 'those women who are in the profession watch them as an educational and inspirational device.' The sexual need of a woman, as a woman, regardless of her public or private status, is always viewed through the lens of prostitutes/public woman's sexuality in a binary of piety and vulgarity. The perception that women would indulge in sexual fantasies has low moral values is common among the consumers as well.

Chauhdry Shaukat Rehman not only indulges in mujra dance videos himself, but also uses them as a marketing tool in his shop for collective male viewing. In his shop, he has placed a small television connected to a cable network, which runs stage shows and mujra programs all the time. He has placed the television behind him at the back wall of the shop, which encourages people/customers and passerby to stand around the main counter, making his shop look busy and crowded. Cable TV has extended the scope of viewership of these mujra dances at the monthly cost of 250 to 400 Rupees. In addition to the fact that it is convenient and cheap for men to watch dances on TV screens instead of costly live performances on stage, it also offers the perpetual state of living in sexual fantasy world. Shaukat stated about his convenience as, 'I have a shop, which requires me to be around. So I work and enjoy at the same time'. They do watch other channels, but rarely. Mujra dances provide him with an additional attraction for passersby so they come into the shop and enjoy free entertainment. After a while, they buy something from the shop, which makes it a profitable activity.

Shaukat does not have a CD player and therefore cannot play mujra dance videos of his own choice; instead he relies on the choice of the cable operator. He is aware of changing mujra trends in packaged CDs, like mix media and other private home mujra videos, but he is not an ardent follower of those dances. Cable operators usually play mujra dances from the recorded stage plays. Therefore, consumption at the collective public level is mostly of mujra stage dances. Shaukat left during the middle of discussion because he had to attend to his shop while rest of the group remained. On my way out

after I finished the session with everyone, I saw Shaukat attending to some customers while others were standing and watching mujras. Everyone seemed to be engrossed in drinking cola drinks, smoking, and/or chewing *pan* (beetle leaves). It appeared to me like a collective consumption of fantasies happening due to the little opportunity at hand. The loud noises from the heavy traffic of the major road of Lahore failed to distract the viewers from watching mujras. Hanging on to what they could, it was a moment of escape into their fantasy filled desire.

By looking at the two scenarios where consumption takes place, both private and public, the need for privacy to fantasize becomes complicated. Where the mention of family members brings about notions of guilt and ethics, which surmount the power of desire, the collective male public space also offers a platform for men to fantasize, knowing very well that the person standing next to him is also doing the same. This knowledge of power of pleasure frees the consumer of all moral and ethical values and guilt. What Shaukat meant by isolation in a private domestic sphere did not mean anything 'bad' or 'evil', as he explained afterwards. Instead, he was connecting the freedom offered in a private space with the flight of fantasy and desire, which are most active when they are free to enjoy. As he continued, 'when one happens to see such program by chance on cable TV, then one feels ashamed in such situation if surrounded by family, like parents and sister.'

A similar concern was also discussed in the customs officers group. Aslam, a customs clearance officer, remarked, 'so if one is alone, then it is natural that it will be exciting for an individual'. I asked if it would be different to watch it with their close male friends, or with a female, like a wife or girlfriend, in a private domestic space or a friends' space. Shehbaz responded as, 'who would not like to watch Nargis<sup>132</sup> dancing?' His comment marked the efficacious value of these dances and the dancers in the arena of sexual desire. I was told about a couple that regularly watch mujra dance videos and other

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<sup>132</sup> Nargis is another dancer who is famous for her good looks and dance. Now she has reached a stage in her career where she only caters to few select private *mujra* parties. Mostly she is concentrating on stage dances.



sexually explicit videos, like porn, together. The husband had been married before and has children. He had been living a notorious lifestyle, which involved many sexual relationships, and had enjoyed private mujra parties regularly. Now he has married a young woman and he spends most of his free time watching these videos at home in the company of his new wife. The gossip within the family focuses more on the character of his new wife, who enjoys watching these videos alongside her husband. No one knows what happens in the privacy of his or her room, but they constantly speculate about the sexual power and control of the wife, who knows how to trigger the male sexual desire.

This couple exemplifies how male consumption in the public and private sphere is accepted, but becomes a concern if it is shared within the domestic sacredness of the home. It is acceptable to see a woman comply with her husband's desires and interest in illicit sexual activities. But women who participate with their husbands in fulfilling their sexual fantasies are usually looked down upon. The guilt starts at home, but is justified in public. The fulfillment is primarily considered for male sexuality and his 'natural' requirements, whereas, female desire is judged with moralist values. The ease for finding justifications for male indulgence is best described by Shehbaz as:

To put it right, I would say in the present situation the way things are going, there are problems and tensions everywhere around us. In home there are tensions, outside tensions, in the work space there are tensions, so basically people want to spend two hours somewhere to lighten oneself up, in some entertainment and peaceful time to enjoy and refresh and release oneself of these tensions.<sup>133</sup>

The tensions for them include paying the utility bills, everyday commuting work, buying groceries, dealing with children's issues, and workplace personnel and employment problems. Most of the men explain their problems and then give them as a rationale for mujra dance consumption. In order to

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<sup>133</sup> Shehzad, In an Interview in 2010 in Lahore.

express the extent of their workload, one of the custom officers stated, 'even for mujra we don't get much time these days'.

### **Fantasizing and desiring women**

During the field research I became aware that for some men desiring women with a particular form and style was important, while for many, anyone will do as long as there is variety and plentitude. Kashif, the shopkeeper, equated the desire for consuming mujra dances with the devouring of food. For him, desiring is not an evidence of appetite, but is a yearning to taste and consume the whole buffet. This also explains the fast-changing styles of several mujra dance video genres. In the cycle of consumption/production, the dancers, as well as the producers, are aware of the constant demands of the consumers, even when they are not spelt out. When a consumer is viewing the dance of Nargis, in the next video he wants obviously to see her with fewer clothes, and eventually to see her dance naked. In the choices for a particular dancer and woman, if she does not expose her body in the dances there are plenty of videos available in the market to fill the vacuum. Unimaginable numbers of videos under several categories in pornography serve different needs, desires, and fantasies of people the world over. Some people like to watch for the fulfillment of their carnal desires, some solely for the sake of entertainment, and still others like to see them for the sake of knowledge.

Kashif, one of the shopkeepers at Hall Road stated:

I have been sitting here in this market for the last twenty-five years. I have seen the period of VHS cassettes. The market for those cassettes was there then and the market for these CDs is still continuing. Since the time the officials have banned the prostitution in the red light area, they have dispersed in the city. Now it is very difficult to judge between two girls of any locality who is virtuous and who is in the sex business. That makes every girl dressed up in public as a prostitute<sup>134</sup>.

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<sup>134</sup> Kashif. In an interview at Hall Road, Lahore. 2010.

Kashif's statement links the consumerism and spread of these porn and mujra dance videos with the dispersion of prostitutes from the Red Light district. His perception that desiring women is related only to prostitutes is in contradiction to the present day high demand for sex scandal genres and VHS sex scandals during the 1980s. The genre thrives primarily because the females in the videos are not prostitutes, and their actions are caught without their awareness of the camera. The comment also justifies the male desire for common women by claiming that they are unable to distinguish the difference between the virtuous and the prostitute. This is another way of talking about the consumption and desire for women by not openly accepting male desires for women, whether virtuous or prostitute. It would be appropriate to use Griffin's idea of pornography, as a particularly graphic depiction of men's need to reassure them that sexuality is controllable. It offers control without the threat of intimacy, and '...hence the monotonous regularity' with which 'over and over again, that part of our beings which can feel in both body and mind is ritually murdered' (Seidler 1987, 101). Desiring women in a similar plentitude over and over again, offers a reassurance to male sexuality about control and confidence.

Other shopkeepers at Hall Road mentioned that what people desire to consume in the privacy of their homes is a mix of all varieties. The ideal mix for a fun night is some western porn and some Indian and Pakistani videos. That way they are able to see the bodies of several women from different nationalities for body shape comparisons. The biggest desire is to explore how each girl looks without her clothes. The categories they are divided into are *chapti* (flat nose) *chikni* (smooth), *moti* (fat), *bijli* (electric), *bachi* (child), aunty, *gori* (white), *kaali* (black). This is the basis of consumption and something so inherent among men. This is what they called the basic instinct or desire to see everyone or consume everything, sometimes only by resorting to watching these on videos. Men demand to see Pakistani women with specifications like big hips and heavy breasts. The fulfillment is never complete, and the regular consumption of porn and mujra dance videos is a complex phenomenon which

not only means the urge to know about sexuality, but also hints at the much more complex notion of the need to have to experience it again and again.

The comments of the interviewees on the mix plate mujra dance genre, in which collages of western porn clips are inserted in between the mujra dances, also showed how people view the object of consumption through digital experimentation. For one person, mixing the two was a 'stupid' idea because they couldn't understand 'why anyone want to mix the beautiful woman with the ugly body. We like to fantasize white body'. He further explains that it is a common practice for everyone to want to approach or propose to a fair complexioned woman. Fair is beautiful for them. They look like *Angrez* (English women) and everyone fantasizes about those women. In an interview with Hassan, a seventeen-year-old consumer, he mentioned that he likes to see the sexual parts of the woman. He said, 'we see how fit and tight is her figure, especially her breasts. Whenever we see these mujra dances, we feel that one wants to be with this woman'. He said he liked those western clips inserted in the mujra dances because those women have 'tight' figures, more so than the Pakistani woman. By looking at them, you feel more *chaska* (tantalizing), and he exclaimed with a smile "*yaar bachi chokas hai, angrazni oopar se popat*" (meaning the chick is horny and moreover is a white Gori). One of the Internet cafe owners stated that by watching these mujra and totey, one gets the feeling that Pakistan is also becoming modern, '*Wa bhai wa. Wah wah*' (applauding). Another net cafe worker commented on the inserted clips thus: 'we want to see porn. We like whatever is available. Whether she is pretty or not, fair or dark, small or heavy breasted are not issues.' He continued, matter-of-factly, that the actual thing is '*ander waarna te kadhna* (in and out). The rest does not really matter'<sup>135</sup>. This was the purest form of the understanding and 'confession' of consumption articulated by any consumer I interviewed. The person acknowledged the power of desire and sexuality to the extent that the object of desire ceases to be important. It is the idea of the desire that takes over the senses of the consumer, and thus the act is complete.

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<sup>135</sup> In a group interview at Mochi gate in 2010, Lahore.

During my discussions with many men, Shaukat, the shopkeeper at Multan Road, appeared to be a man who was straightforward and had a very practical approach. On the question of desiring white and fair complexioned women, he dismissed the idea by suggesting that each man should first look into the mirror to find out if he deserves such a woman. For him, the grass is always greener on the other side, so one should always enjoy it, but remember reality. Through his arguments it appeared that the notion of fantasy was out of the question in life. The only time he let go of his practical side and gave way to fantasy was through a discussion of the dress of the mujra dancers. He stated that when he returns home after a long hard day, he sometimes wishes that his wife would dress and look like the dancers. For him, the clothes of a mujra dancer are modifications of traditional *lacha* (wrap-skirt) and *ghagra* (flared skirt) dresses which rely a lot on the upper garment called *choli* (blouse). The *cholis* are very tight to accentuate the fullness of body form, but they are now often designed to have slits at the sides, which reveal part of the breast when the dancer jumps and moves her breast vigorously. The *ghagras* also reveal the legs to a great extent, and the dancer in her movements suggestively pulls them up and down according to the lyrics and the mood of the song. I asked him, 'if you are asked what is your major/biggest desire regarding these mujra dances, so what will you say?' to which, after a long discussion, he answered straightforwardly, reverting back to his practical self: 'I am already in a business and focus only on fulfilling basic needs like food, shelter, then one wants more. The desires are never ending. Even if you get Nargis, she will be nothing after a while. There are more after her'.

Shehbaz was smiling, while sitting in a park, when I asked about his preference for mujra dance videos. He stated that, '*yeh shaitaniat wala kaam hai*' (this is a devils way). So I enquired, 'Why do you call it *shaitaniat*?' he replied, 'Well, illegal and extramarital sexual indulgences in Islam is forbidden. It is so much regulated...we are told to have sex with wives in the dark only so that no one sees each other's genital parts'. That intrigued me so I inquired further. His response showed that there are no strict codes or indoctrinations,

but that they are all imparted through different *maulvis*<sup>136</sup> and some interpretation of the religious texts. The way people accept such accounts of sexual behavior is reflected through Shehbaz's confession, that he could never muster enough courage to ask further questions to the maulvi, fearing that he will be labeled immature and a novice. He further elaborated, 'because there are many restrictions on the open discourse of sexuality, and one feels constantly under pressure to find ways and seek guidance, that's why the viewing of these videos is common'. While I articulate the consumption, it is important to understand how the whole process of negotiation takes place. The guilt of consuming, producing, and distributing material while living in a moralist society overrides the joy of freely indulging in the sexual practices, which surfaces commonly when they are approached. Abdurrahman, an interviewee from the customs officer group, said, 'basically these things are not good for new generation', This was a typical statement that recognizes one's needs and sexual desires, but dismisses other people's right to desire.

#### **Age: aesthetics of desire and aphrodisiacs**

On the question of age, I wanted to know if different age groups manifest their desires through different aesthetics and preferences. Kamran, the owner of an Internet cafe, elaborated the indulgence pattern according to age. For him, youngsters going through puberty are mostly keen to find out about sexuality, whereas old people who 'can't get it up' use the Internet to get ideas and fulfillment. Khalid Jutt elaborated on the changing trends of consumption of these videos in terms of age. For him, older men like *mujra* dances more and they are also the major buyers of sex pills, local *hakimi*, *Unani* aphrodisiacs, and other concoctions available at the same shops. He mentioned how the makers of such local aphrodisiac pills provide them for selling purposes and these are sold alongside the CDs at the shop. The consumption pattern and production of these pills go hand in hand. The distribution centers of *mujra* videos help to fully consume the product. The aphrodisiac pills signal the use of *mujra* videos as an aid to masturbation or sex. The sellers of these *mujra* videos ensure that the consumption culminates at ejaculation; therefore,

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<sup>136</sup> Muslim clerics.

the package is only complete when the customer leaves the video shop with pills along with variety of women dancers recoded on compact disks. Doctor Usman Malik is a medical doctor who has performed numerous surgeries of sexually related conditions at Ganga Ram Hospital in central Lahore. I interviewed him to understand his opinion of the many layers of sexuality in this society. Doctor Malik discussed the fears and anxieties of men relating to their sexualities, noting that many men come to seek advice regarding anxieties over their sexual performance and the size of their penises. According to him, these are mostly men who watch BP CDs (blue print, a term used by many consumers to refer to pornography or nude images) a lot and after watching the porn are concerned about the size of their penises and the duration of their performance. The making of porn films and their performance affects the psychology of the males to the extent that they wonder about the two-hour-long sex and erections that porn stars seem capable of sustaining, while the patients' performances last for only a few minutes. In such cases, Doctor Malik refers them to counseling sessions in which the making of the porn graphics and their production regarding their fantasies is discussed.

Shaukat and his group responded to western film *totey* inserted in the mujra dance CDs. He stated that the new generation prefers western porn film *totey* (cut-pieces), while the older generation likes mujra more. However, their own personal preference was mujra dances. Shaukat said that he like these dances when he is 'in a mood to enjoy and entertain myself'. He further elaborated this as, '*Tharrak* (debauchery) is always in the mind of men, whether he is a religious, pious or whatever.' For him, the younger generation tends to watch open sex scenes, whereas mature men enjoy looking at the body of the dancer, watching the dance movement, and listening to the song. The gestures of the dancing woman make men feel that he is the one that she desires. On the other hand, boys between the ages of 18 and 25 like to watch porn films purely for sexual information, so they usually find these mujra dances quite boring. They are on the hunt for open nude pictures to fulfill their sexual appetite. Kashif, the shopkeeper at Hall Road, stated that "men demands

these videos as BP (blue prints), whereas, the young boys of college age are more interested in exploring the girls around them and less in the CDs.” He also mentioned how many men come ‘a week before their marriage to get the videos so that they can educate themselves’. Zamania Aslam is a Project Officer and researcher at Lok Rehs, a social and political dramatic NGO. She has a Masters in Fine Arts from Punjab University, and in her thesis she depicted several moods of sex, before and after the couple reach climax. Regarding her perception of people’s consumption of pornographic materials, she remarked, “boys watch porn film continuously and pursue more actively masturbation than older males.” With her, more co-workers joined and talked about sexuality and power. The notion of sexual satisfaction in one’s life is of utmost importance, since it helps the person to function regularly.

This chapter presented a vast array of perceptions about sexual desire and examined modes of consumption of mujra dance videos. It is also worth noting how different age groups and people coming from different backgrounds formed these perceptions about the sexuality of males from other classes. The several perspectives of the consumption of these videos include: private viewing and open consumption; how the youth looks at this practice; and the difference in consumption of different genres by different age groups. These have been articulated to position the complex notion of consumption within an analytical framework of desire. I identified the complexities that surround the notion of masculinity and its constructions. The variety of people across ages and classes in Lahore offers divergent perceptions about desiring the dancers and women present among different social groups. I argued that consumption of mujra dance videos in contemporary digitized popular culture of Pakistan is a much more complex phenomenon than simple desire for sexual pleasure. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to analyze the consumption behavior and pattern. In an era when media is seen everywhere, this chapter plays a critical role in establishing how people imagine, perceive, and negotiate their desire for mujra dances videos. The transforming sites of desire, from cable TV networks to Internet cafes in new media has enabled men to fulfill their desires at low cost, at any time of the day according to their will, and has



helped males from lower socio-economic backgrounds transcend computer and technology literacy. This chapter continued the argument started in the first chapter, elaborating techniques of negotiations male desire successfully employed by exercising their agency in the rigid socio-political context of Pakistan.

## Chapter 6

## Virtual Sexuality: Mujra Videos on YouTube

This chapter encapsulates the main argument of the dissertation by critically analyzing the sexuality discourse generated by the presence mujra dance videos on YouTube<sup>137</sup>. I read the virtual space of YouTube as a continuation of urban geography of Lahore which has been analyzed previous. The analysis of sexuality and masculinity discourse around mujra dance videos' production, circulation, and consumption is understood further by incorporating YouTube discourse created through a peculiar process with which the wider community interacts in a virtual space through posting comments and the tagging of these videos. The interface and search paths of YouTube allow mediation between different videos of sometimes a contradictory nature. This mediation is reminiscent of contradictions and dichotomies related to Mujra video practices produced in the one and half kilometer Mall Road of Lahore, which were examined in detail in the first chapter. I show that the viewers and commentators use abusive and sexually explicit language to express their desire, which is not necessarily linked with the content of the video. This freedom is peculiar to YouTube, which helps transform the site of mujra dance practices from tradition brothel houses to film, stage, CD, net café and then the virtual site, making a digital circuit of illicit sexual desire. Analyzing posts provides an insight about how people form a community based on mutual desire for mujra videos with vague awareness of the other posts' identity. These posts are a continuation of techniques and technologies, an agency of new media consumer, expressed through writing comments and tagging styles. The complete or partial anonymity offered by YouTube helps generate explicit comments, forming a new

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<sup>137</sup> It is essential to see the Internet and its penetration in present day Pakistan. 'Br broadband users in Pakistan have 1,912,152 marks, as of February 2012, as per recently published stats by Pakistan Telecommunication Authority<sup>137</sup>. PTA stats said that Internet Service Providers of Pakistan added a total of 44,370 broadband subscribers in April 2010 compared to addition of 55,932 broadband subscribers in March 2010'<sup>137</sup>, states the website for Pakistani telecom and IT news. In the face of very low literacy rate in Pakistan, Internet usage is on the rise, which has also been stated in the research reports of several telecommunication networks and sites, including Information Economy Report 2009, published by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (Unctad).<sup>137</sup>

medium for a critical appraisal of exclusive mujra dance videos. The aim of this chapter is to contribute significantly to the present growing body of studies on new media and digital technologies including YouTube and the Internet, to establish how it is used as an agency for the fulfillment of sexual desire, especially in the Muslim world.

New media in the Muslim world locates itself in the premise of piety and religious sermon discourse. By closely analyzing the theoretical framework of Charles Hirschkind, this study fills gaps in the present scholarship of piety and new media discourse, and argues that new media facilitates consumers to simultaneously express their sexual desire by keeping anonymity. I investigate consumers' techniques of negotiations and argue that they successfully use their agency to mediate between piety and explicit sexual desire to subvert overtly orthodox religious and state's structures. As I examined Hirschkind's analysis regarding virtue and piety in the practice of cassette sermon in Egypt in detail in the first chapter, I argue here that males in a Muslim Society within a public piety framework use new media for establishing a sense of Muslimness while successfully negotiate their agency to engage in explicit illicit sexual practices. New media, especially YouTube, offers a space for males to feel moral and pious by commenting with judgment on the 'vulgarity' and 'obscenity' of the mujra dancers, while at the same time, expressing their sexual desire for the same female performers. Thus, reading these comments as a medium, a discourse by a supporter of religious and moral values aligns this medium with creative negotiations in the cultural context of physical space of Lahore. The creative use of negotiations and dichotomies on a public space of YouTube establish a similar sense of Muslimness argued earlier and the fluidity of new media technologies has a potential to penetrate rigid social structures the way it manipulated rigid ideologies imposed by state and other external factors.

This chapter starts by establishing a contextual framework of YouTube search paths of mujra dance practices and links these paths with the discursive practices of mujra dance video surrounding Mall Road, Lahore. The first section elaborates mujra dance videos genres on YouTube, and explores the unique way in which the practice of tagging and titling of videos takes place. The socio-politics of tagging reflects on one level the interest in generating a political

debate that addresses issues regarding issues of region or sectarian conflicts, while on another level it signals the intertwining nature of sexual desire with all these issues stated above. It also responds to the question of how they embark on political and religious discourse when the dance video panders only to male desire. The next section of the chapter critically analyses comments posted under mujra dance videos, which are termed as a medium borne out of the practice of participating in sexual practices. I argue that these texts written by users on YouTube are narratives of male desire, written spontaneously using anonymity as a technique for fulfillment of ones' desires. This section addresses questions like: What exactly is it about the newness of YouTube that makes it the strongest interactive community-defining virtual site, which acts as a continuation of sexuality discourse present in the urban geography of the city; and how are terms like 'Muslim Porn' and others used to express sexual desire infused with religious identity and blasphemous content. These negotiations are agencies offered by a space of freedom for people to express their political and social issues through the videos of desire. The abusive language used in these dance videos resembles the freedom of the real space where the discursive practices in Lahore offer the freedom of circulation and consumption along with production in the face of overt religious ideology. The space of YouTube provides a public venue with an option to log in and participate with an acquired user name which removes personal insecurity, any possibility of an immediate threat to the personal identity and location, resulting in more freedom of sexual expression.

### **Virtual space of YouTube and urban geography of Hall Road: Mujra dance video discourse**

The rationale to choose YouTube over other Internet porn websites for the analysis in this chapter is its peculiar characteristic that impels sexuality discourse similar to the urban geography of Lahore. YouTube is a public forum, open for all like streets of Lahore, where people exercise their agency to get engaged in collective activities of sharing and posting on videos. Their engagement is what Hirschkind terms as communal activities in public interaction that design the collective existence. The comments posted on the

mujra videos are 'communal reflexivity', which reflects the values of Islamic society indoctrinated through various media (2006, 8). In the communal space of YouTube, the notion of piety and Muslimness filters through the overtly illicit detailed sexual comments, revealing desire for the female dancer and her body parts. This sense of community is very close to the discourse examined on the streets of Mall Road where people continue to perform mujra dance video practices while using dichotomies and negotiations as successful techniques of subverting their desire in the face of orthodox society. I reiterate that this analysis will fill the gaps in the existing study of new media in the Muslim world, as the prime focus in these studies is how people form their identity based on piety notion by using media technologies. This analysis claims that people use notion of piety as a technique to establish their connection with wider Muslimness while simultaneously fulfilling their illicit sexual desires mediated through the same digital and new media. Hirschkind experiences new media users forming singular identities without any reference to other usage of media technology by the same generation that mediates between social and religious identities. In addition to his argument, I assert that this mediation is evident through a comparison of previously examined Google map of Mall Road with YouTube interface. By closely examining the Google map image, one observes that the city and structures of law enforcement, law making, and the mushrooming illegal business of pornography shops are all located within a close vicinity of a kilometer and a half, creating a closed circuit (fig. 6.1). This circuit, which includes law-enforcing structures in close proximity to pornography distribution sites, shows the ease with which state departments operate side-by-side in the urbanity of modern everyday business in apparent contradiction to state ideology without provoking any conflict in the consciousness of people/citizens. The popular consumption of desire, particularly in the form of mujra and porn CDs, is operated within these spaces along with the continuation of the religious practice as part of everyday activities. It is apparent that people know that they are practicing religion and endorses moral values laid out by larger social and traditional structure. They also know

that the use of sexual material is bad, according to the larger framework, but using these materials is also accepted as a male's 'natural' need.



Fig. 6.1 Screenshot of a web page showing the Lal Mosque controversy, religious debates and *Mujra* dance videos on the same page. The map of Lahore similarly shows *mujra* dance videos and their practices along with law enforcing state institutions. The urban geography of Mall Road parallel to YouTube supports the main argument, which will be elaborated in detail in the last chapter.

YouTube and its search paths offer a virtual space where people continue to practice their sexual desire while negotiating or accepting their religious beliefs. The adjacent image of the screenshot of YouTube shows a discussion over a controversial issue of the Lal (Red) Mosque in Islamabad. The controversy is between the right wing political groups and liberal social and political groups about the *qabaza* (illegal possession) of the Red Mosque by a religious militant political group, which was attacked by the Pakistan Army on the charges of attacking innocent citizens, and illegal possession of the mosque and the public library (Bano 2010). On the right side of the image on the YouTube, links, and paths about other videos are posted which also include *Mujra* dance videos. A typical interface of any social website offers information through video on religious, political, and other social issues as well as advertising the latest *Mujra* dances and/or female escorts and other everyday consumer items. These are then simulated through the interface of the virtual space, YouTube, where discussion of religious ideologies, practices, and sexual indulgence videos are simultaneously being watched and actively commented on. This crossover practice of pleasure by overtly religious ideologues forms layers, overlapping and sometimes practiced side by side.

Hirschkind defines public space as independent of the state (2006, 34), and I continue with his position by adding that the morality in public space created due to decades long religious and moral indoctrination in Pakistani society is comparatively subversive of the popular religious doctrine. These subversions are nuanced as they don't defy religious values, but instead, while endorsing them, continue to express overtly sexual desire, designating these indoctrinations squishy and porous. Mujra dance video is placed next to the debate on Lal Mosque controversy, primarily due to search path patterns of the user, which is similar to the presence of Alfalah Theater and Zaitoon plaza in Hall Road to the Punjab Assembly and Civil Lines Police station. The same media is used in Pakistan to create a generation of young Muslims who are devout and conscious about moral conduct, duties, and the power of religion, and feel at ease with new media's facilitation in fulfilling sexual desire. Sexual fulfillment is only a single click away after reading the debate on Lal Mosque, or any other religious debates/sermons.

The un-layering of the social fabric on the interface of virtuality – YouTube – is clearly experienced when one encounters some videos which are diametrically opposite in their content and yet are displayed side-by-side. I am including another example as evidence which shows Dr Zakir Naik along with explicit videos of females. This explains the strange paths these videos take following the search patterns of the viewers which are also a result of tagging. The mishmash is actually a true picture showing the complexities of the social and cultural structures, constantly negotiating the politics of identities. In that manner, YouTube's paths converge with Mall Road, Lahore, where within a one and a half kilometre radius one finds the Punjab Assembly, the Alfalah Theater where mujra dance performances take place, the Hall Road plazas where the selling of pirated and pornographic videos occurs, and the Lahore High Court that banned Naseebo Lal's song on the charge of obscenity and vulgarity. The dynamic relationship of the real space of Lahore with the virtual reality of YouTube and social media is significant in order to understand the discursive practices being developed amongst consumers, and participants as a continuation of a complex social fabric. The possibilities that YouTube offers



to its ever-increasing community have been significantly highlighted by studies conducted by various scholars regarding the nature, archival aspects, and communication among users; nevertheless, the exclusive usage of YouTube among the mujra fan community has not been studied so far. I examine the space of YouTube in order to understand not only the newness of the media and much-debated work done by most of the scholarships on YouTube, but most significantly, to contribute further in locating the very notion of 'newness' in the exclusive use of the new public forum for Pakistani or South Asian community.



Figure 6.2: Screen shot of YouTube demonstrating the peculiar path of participant is searching for Mujra. Zakir Naik, a famous religious personality, and other religious debates manage to become part of the YouTube interface.

Arguably, an extension of the old media that is being continued through new technologies (Walter 2003, 122), the transposition of political and religious issues affects and changes the Islamic discourse through new media within a society preoccupied with religious identity. The complicated juxtaposition of

entertainment and commercial endeavors thus forms a new public space both in the virtual realm and in the physical urban-scape of the city (Eickelman 2003, 14). The ways in which people occupy and operate their everyday existence and negotiate with ideologies and cultural influences showcases that they are fulfilling their desires through creative and productive means, and the search paths offered by virtual space. The link of a virtual space with the physical space is not a simple one, but is intermingled with a robust sexual desire and religious morality and dichotomies.

## ***Section 1***

### ***Mujra videos on YouTube and the discourse of sexual politics***

It is pertinent for developing an analysis of sexual discourse of mujra dance video practices on YouTube that we briefly look into the socio-cultural and political context of YouTube in Pakistan. Following the similar path of the dichotomies examined in the first chapter in which I presented statistics of highest hits on porn sites in Pakistan and the religious party's rally against Fox News, YouTube was blocked in Pakistan in mid-September 2012 on charges of blasphemy. A video titled *Innocence of Muslims* was posted on YouTube that was considered offensive to Islam by a huge number of Muslims in the world. In response to public pressure and violent protests by Pakistani religious groups, the government banned YouTube rather than putting firewalls for filtering any insulting and abusive material. The government decided to lift the ban after initiating measures to not only bar the blasphemous content on YouTube, but also taking measures to filter porn sites. The interior minister Rehman Malik on his tweet message announced the lift as,

*There was a gr8 demand to unblock Utube from all sections of society  
esp fellow tweeps..expect the notification tday! Hope u r all happy now*

— Rehman Malik (@SenRehmanMalik) December 28, 2012<sup>138</sup>

But ironically the ban was reinstated immediately after a few minutes when a right leaning anchor on Geo TV accused the government of failed attempts to successfully bar the content, which was discovered by the anchorperson as still available to users in Pakistan<sup>139</sup>. To date,

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<sup>138</sup> Shu, Catherine. *Pakistan's YouTube ban is lifted and then Reinstated as observers worry about Internet Freedom*. Sunday, December 30, 2012. Retrieved on 16<sup>th</sup> Feb 2013.

<sup>139</sup> Masood, Salman. *Pakistan Lifts YouTube Ban, for 3 Minutes*. December 29, 2012, The New York Times, Asia pacific section, retrieved on February 16<sup>th</sup> 2013.

the ban is in place despite much pressure from public and social media and the efforts of Interim government to lift the ban in their short rule before the general elections of 2013.

This incident explains the efficacy of people's agency in maneuvering their way around the state and its authoritarian rule to establish moral codes and pious Muslimness. People still use YouTube and other porn sites in Pakistan by downloading proxies which enable the barred sites including YouTube, and people continue to practice their illicit sexual desires on Internet under the larger ideological umbrella of piety and Muslimness (please see fig. 6.3)

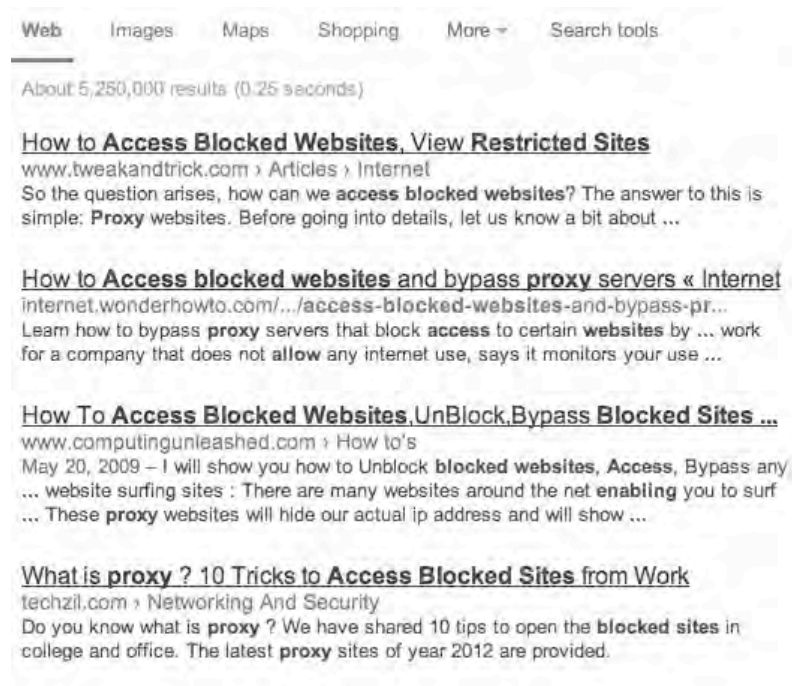


Fig. 6.3 This image shows a Google search for proxy websites.

Virtual social spaces like YouTube provide forums where viewers not only enjoy videos posted by other members, but also communicate their views and opinions about the contents presented<sup>140</sup>. Some studies call this space a platform, one of the many 'metaphors widely used to stress YouTube's social, economic and technological importance. When plummeting into YouTube discourse, one indeed wonders about the apparent resemblance YouTube bears

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<sup>140</sup> In an article on entertainment and Internet use in net cafes in Lahore, an insufficient assessment of the trends was carried out. They provided a list of twenty-two activities, with entertainment, meaning gaming/music, as one of the categories of purposes of going to Internet cafes. It is written in the article that a list of activities was 'provided to the respondents, who were asked to indicate the activities they themselves mainly engaged in when using the Internet cafes' (Batool & Mehmood 2012, 6).

to a number of established cultural institutions' (Snickars 2009, 13). In the presence of the vast availability of 'censored'<sup>141</sup> *desi* and western cut-pieces or *totey* from local and western porn industry, I would like to highlight the use of the social networking and entertainment site of YouTube and the heavy presence of Mujra dance videos as a complex phenomenon. The popular mujra dance videos, stage shows, and sex scandals of different kinds have found their way through tagging techniques, sometime with original titles but generally sensational tagging. It seems that the user-friendly interface, uploading and membership technicalities, and Google's popularity as a search engine are key factors in the heavy usage of videos by mujra dance consumers<sup>142</sup>.

There are several genres of mujra dances, which have already been discussed in Chapter Three, where I explain that some of them are shots from a live performance on stage. The professional dance numbers are extracted from stage dramas. Sometimes one gets the impression that the video is made by someone in the audience, while sometimes professional CDs are released of the famous dances and then uploaded. This leads to questions regarding who is uploading these videos, and if there is any notion of copyrights etc. in operation or not. These questions are difficult to answer because the identity of the uploading person is usually not known, even if they use their own name.

It has been argued that during the last ten years the production of semi-porn *mujra* dance videos using digital technologies has not only infiltrated the social web, but also made it accessible to people of all ages and backgrounds at a very low price. The user-friendly aspect of the digital technology has helped

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<sup>141</sup> By using the term censored I mean to comment on the way sexual content is present with the tag names of sex, intercourse, and many more hinting towards views of sex and nudity. In many videos, however, the content is censored in order to conform to the restriction by the YouTube. But by following certain paths and registration as an adult viewer, one can view some sexually illicit content videos.

<sup>142</sup> In an article on entertainment and Internet use in net cafes in Lahore, an insufficient assessment of the trends was carried out. They provided a list of twenty-two activities, with entertainment, meaning gaming/music, as one of the categories of purposes of going to Internet cafes. It is written in the article that a list of activities was 'provided to the respondents, who were asked to indicate the activities they themselves mainly engaged in when using the Internet cafes' (Batool & Mehmood 2012, 6). Entertainment itself is a big generalized category that requires explanation or subcategories in a questionnaire of this kind.

transform it into a full-grown industry, where the production, circulation, and a huge database of porn videos and semi-porn *mujra* dance videos are handled through various channels. The huge and growing consumption of these videos is primarily due to the availability of these semi-porn dance videos in internet cafes and virtual spaces like YouTube, which acts like 'a media archive where amateur curators scan the media environment, searching for meaningful bits of content, and bringing them to a larger public (through legal and illegal means) (Jenkins, 2006, 275). This technological ease helps restructure some of the passive notions of male desire and sexuality to more active videos that question the basis of male sexual identity.

### ***Caught red handed or 'reality show'***

In this genre I have placed the most popular couples videos in a date scenes with or without any sexual intimacy, which usually attracts a huge number of hits.<sup>143</sup> These videos sometimes include an intimate moment between the two lovers, which is recorded by a camera held by the male partner or by a friend present there, or is hidden somewhere. Usually the male participant is aware of the fact that the video is being made for the market and wider circulation on the Internet, so it is commonly the naive females who are unaware that they are going to be viewed on YouTube. This fact makes these videos the most desirable and hot items, as is evident by receiving a huge rate of hits. This is apparent by closely examining the comments made by some of the viewers who scold the video uploader. Private videos of the dances of girls in the universities and the colleges and in the weddings of families also attract lots of hits and comments.<sup>144</sup> The comments made under these videos usually target the females as a center of sexual gratification and then embark on standard India – Pakistan hate-debate where Islamic values and ethics discourse is created, which I examine in the second section of the chapter. To further the evidence on

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<sup>143</sup> Video on YouTube. hits: 3,596,895. Retrieved on 3.06.12.  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jlXgvyAS6WU&feature=related>,

<sup>144</sup> Video on YouTube. hits: 1,860,445, Retrieved on 03.06.12.  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ua4evLOIScc&feature=fvwp>,

YouTube, please refer to the link in the footnote<sup>145</sup> where a simple wedding party video has generated lots of interest and comments, which also does not have any explicit content to present. This is elaborated by Jean Burgess and Joshua Green thus:

‘in some ways, the popularity metrics do just what we might think – they measure the relative popularity of individual videos over a given time period, according to various criteria. But this is not all they do. They are not representation of reality, but technologies of representation’. (Burgess & Green, 2010, 40)

Therefore, one can understand the phenomenon of using pseudo-identities that provide one with a freedom to express what one feels without any fear of real threat or danger, but on the other hand one continues to present the same identity issues which surround every day cultural politics of Pakistan. Caroline Humphrey notes how the real world conservative value system is dictating the ethics and values on virtual space even in the identity one assumes (2009, p 45). She even questions the realities of everyday when the so-called masked identity of the imaginary self is contested on the virtual space (ibid. 46).

### ***Private mujra party***

The various kinds of private mujra party videos present us with a huge array of variety, where different social classes, urban and rural aesthetics, and several levels of religiousness find lots of space.<sup>146</sup> The referred video is significant as it says on the video that writing comments is disabled. So one can enjoy the video, which is tagged with explicit religious connotations like Wahhabi dances, but writing a comment on it is not allowed. In this category, I also include simple private wedding parties where people are indulged into viewing the dances and enjoying it. By just looking at this genre, one can see the sexual practices and behavioral patterns among males in the rural settings and urban environment. A very interesting angle to this study is by comparing the *Saturday Night* mujra series, catering to the upper middle and rich classes,

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<sup>145</sup> Video on YouTube.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Xw2P3VXGA8&feature=related>

<sup>146</sup> Videos on YouTube.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=88N6d3GwGaI>,

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nHMdcJFhsPo&feature=related>,

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S28nLqAm3HQ&feature=related>,

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M-kA9E2IigM&feature=related>,

unlike other not very 'sophisticated' videos of Punjabi mujra dances, according to the perception of Salman, the maker and the model of this video series<sup>147</sup>. As discussed previously, in this series an attempt was made to show a westernized environment and popular Bollywood sensibility with Indian songs. The series was very popular in the beginning of the decade, but did not find popularity on YouTube, as is reflected by comparing the number of hits these videos received. It is also significant to note that this series was launched in a VCD format, which was later uploaded on YouTube by someone else as 'rich people partying in Defence' (a posh locality in Lahore). The comments under the videos denied the location of a video in Lahore, but instead contested that the location is actually in India, and therefore this is Indian propaganda to defame Pakistan. The denial with such vehemence of acknowledging the presence of such materials and the people who like to indulge in sexually illicit activities within Pakistan does not compel me to search for the 'truth' but rather to look at it as a moment of reflection on the state of denial in the general consciousness of the Pakistani mindset.

### ***Framing desire and politics: Tagging and titling on YouTube***

The dance videos are usually tagged with the name of the dancer, sometimes the title of the song and the words like, *desi*, hot, sexy, latest mujra etc.<sup>148</sup> Many of these videos consist of mujra videos which are originally made in VCD format for distribution at Hall Road only. These videos are typically done with dance scenes in some room, stage, garden with rain shower and with addition of the editing gimmicks like fire and stars and other mirror-like patterns emerging and moving around the dancer. A typical dance would take several close shots of the breast in movement, shaking her boobs and/or

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<sup>147</sup> Videos on YouTube.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pS7Hf\\_Ua3Rk&feature=relmfu](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pS7Hf_Ua3Rk&feature=relmfu), and [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahOW0iM6\\_EE&feature=relmfu](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahOW0iM6_EE&feature=relmfu) with the lowest number of hits ranging from few hundred to maximum 20,000 hits which is very low considering the videos with no obvious sexual content generating much higher popularity hits.

<sup>148</sup> Video on YouTube.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LmDFICpRMII&feature=related>

revealing the nipples for a brief moment by lifting her shirt up or lowering down on the floor/bed with a low neck-lined shirt.<sup>149</sup> That is what can be termed in mujra dance video sensibility as 'money shot' where close camera shots and editing tools are used to highlight the central focus of the dance.

The additional categories of semi-professional homemade 'sexy' and 'hot' videos are not the center of my research therefore I did not discuss them in the previous chapters. But it is pertinent to articulate these in order to contextualize the behavioral pattern of the users of YouTube and their preferences, which reflects the contemporary digitized culture of Pakistan. The shots of call girls or interaction with them revealing the comfortableness with the use of mobile phone cameras<sup>150</sup> during the interaction are also widely available under the same category of mujra dances. Sometimes a song is used in the background but the sensations of the videos are usually in the conversations among the participants. This is very relevant material that offers lots of anthropological reading of the raw materials, which are then uploaded by one of the people present in the scene. It shows an issue of representation and very importantly, how masculinity is conceived and presented by playing not only with the open sexual experiences in the society, but also with the help of easy technological tools.

Tagging the video while uploading it could be the most politically stimulating act breeding response from other viewers, which are tantalizing, sensational, and full of heated debate on regional politics like India-Pakistan differences etc. But the most important and intriguing aspect of tagging of this video posted on YouTube is whether performer is a professional dancer or not, the discussion goes around the Indian Pakistani political discourse or the Shia Wahhabi religious discourse - the two contested issues. These videos, by using female performances and dances, provide a platform for commentators to release their anger at the other imagined enemy, a monster in the popular

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<sup>149</sup> Video on YouTube.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xxhw-iKf6Ro&feature=related>

<sup>150</sup> Video on YouTube. hits: 9,886,882. Retrieved on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012. Comments disabled.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9RzXohhCqnE&feature=fvrel>,



discourse prevalent in the society at the moment.<sup>151</sup> The female dancer becomes the site of contest where conflict is played between two parties filled with robust desire inflamed by these heated debates.

Under discussion is one such video of a young girl (fully clothed) titled, 'Pakistani Shia Muslim girl wit boys'. I encountered this video when I started my research by collecting mujra dance videos present in the market, which is on Hall Road. After watching this video, I kept it aside as it did not fit into the larger scheme of the thesis. Upon surfing YouTube for other mujra dances, I was struck when I encountered the same video with a different title, and that triggered more research on this issue. This video already had 1,186,715 views and 667 comments in 2010. When you scroll down the comments, one wonders about the dance and the performer, but also delves in the context that is created by different comments that initiated the religious discourse.

The act of tagging and uploading of a video, acquired from the market, transforms the context of video from one center of pirate economy to another center of virtual space, facilitating the parallel economy, and allowing it shape its own course. My position following Larkin's study in understanding the routes of material transportation can also be argued by using Jean Burgess and Joshua Green's statement that 'cultural production in the digital environment, where marginal, subcultural, and community-based modes of cultural production are by design incorporated within these commercial logics of major media corporations' (Burgess, 2010, 75). The material that is being viewed on YouTube goes through so many channels and centers of piracy that authenticity or authorship is difficult to maintain. Moreover, creative and ingenious circuits are formed reflecting socio-cultural discourse that in many instances does not reflect the merging of community-based subcultural videos into the commercial logic of major media corporations. I would argue that it is a merging of all forms of cultural production that is not only subculture but also mainstream sentiment,

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<sup>151</sup> Videos on YouTube.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2NUt8rMAhyM&feature=Playlist&p=C75F833C2E82B006&playnext=1&playnext\\_from=PL&index=8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2NUt8rMAhyM&feature=Playlist&p=C75F833C2E82B006&playnext=1&playnext_from=PL&index=8)

this link is now removed by the user when I was checking again on 4<sup>th</sup> January 2012. It is now available on YouTube with the link as,

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ryyy6GVdXl4&feature=related> dated 4<sup>th</sup> January 2012.

controlled by major media corporation for reasons other than commercial. The popularity of this video is surprising because it does not have any illicit content, in terms of showing flesh or any obscene acts, but it still provokes people to comment on religio-political aspects. The discourse generated by that video with overt sensationalism does not end here. The same video is later on available on YouTube with another tag name. This time it is recycled as 'Indian girl' mujra dance video, to create even more hype.<sup>152</sup>

## ***Section 2***

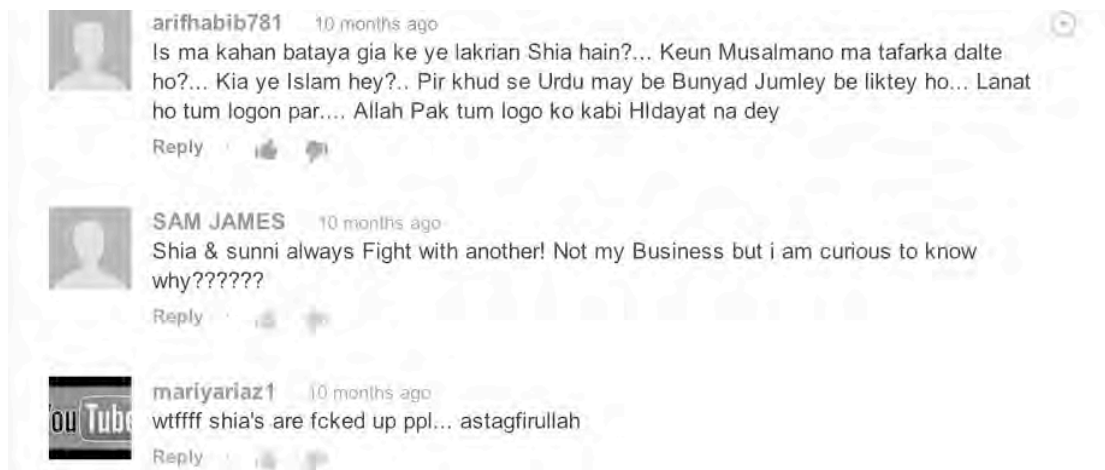
### ***Politics of desire: Reading comments on mujra dance videos on YouTube***

The comments on the videos posted on YouTube sometimes reflect Lahore's vernacular expression. The most interesting comments series is on the video of the girl dancing which I have just discussed titled 'Shia girl dancing with boys'. As I mentioned above, the title has started a debate which reflects the conflict over religious discourse existing in Pakistan. I argue that using videos of women dancing to address issues of conflict is reflective of ethnic and other religious sentiments that form several layers of the social fabric, which are expressed freely utilizing the freedom promised by YouTube. The fact is that expressing these comments to the face of another person in the public realm would create results that would end in catastrophe, while YouTube offers an alternative platform in environments and societies, which are a boiling pot of such sentiments. Another relevant video in this context is only about an interview of a dancer explains how she prays to Allah as part of her gratitude to Him.<sup>153</sup> The fact that someone has tagged the video as a Shia dancer generated a lot of angry responses, though one of the responses did reprimand the others for being careful because as the name suggests, the person does not belong to this part of the world and is curious to see such conflicts on YouTube,

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<sup>152</sup> Video on YouTube. 4:06:12, 10 pm  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ryyy6GVdXl4&feature=related>,

<sup>153</sup> Video on YouTube. 20/05/12 8:47 pm  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=endscreen&v=loRbHkVzPFc&NR=1>



#### 6.4 A screen shot of YouTube comments

As Jean Burgess and Joshua Green state, 'YouTube is big enough, and global enough, to count as a significant mediating mechanism for the cultural public sphere' (Burgess, 77). The comments on these videos are reflective of existing social and cultural fabric of public consciousness and are being operated on by the inherent participatory nature of the YouTube. The fact that participants feel free to express themselves without censorship makes the whole phenomenon even more active. According to Humphrey, 'the forum life is no less real and objective than 'real life', but it is livelier, more talkative, angrier, more pluralistic and idealistic than everyday worlds hidebound by established authority' (Humphrey, 47). The freedom of sexual expression, to be able to communicate freely in a language which is devoid of any structures, whether of social values or linguistic constraints, and the ease with technology, helps to form a platform to enable cultural participation by ordinary citizens' (Burgess, 75). The way community is formed is also a significant aspect of YouTube where mere interaction on any given video can help form a group that is called community in virtual realm. The collective creativity in the case of these videos is formed on mutual desire for a dancing woman by positioning the other members of the community as opponents to vent out the sentiments curtailed in a physical space. In that instance, YouTube is a ring where every one is fighting for the championship.

The comments reflect very strong expressions of male sexuality venting out their heated emotions under the garb of religion, regional politics, and gender politics. After closely reading most of the comments, one comes to conclusion that even when one takes the position of a moral vanguard, there is somehow a mutual understanding to not question the presence of each other on such 'vulgar' materials. It is also to be noted that even though the uploader of such videos is usually condemned, people usually don't make an effort to state why these videos are tagged with a religious tint. If the value of the material is only based on the visuality of the video then why delve into some other religious or political discourse? After comparing the videos with an explicit sexual content to these videos, which possess a lesser degree of obscenity but come with the additional *masala* of the above-mentioned emotions, it is clear that the latter type received a much higher number of hits and comments. The public space requires much more complex material to reflect the complexities of such discourse already existent within Pakistani society. The notion that in other sexually explicit videos one also finds a strong tendency towards bringing politics and religion in between the discussion over desire is appropriately transforming us all from "voyeurs to participants" (Creeber & Martin, 2005, 15).

### ***Commenting on Religion and Desire***

The comments below are part of the heated debate over the dance of 'Shia Muslim girl dancing wit boys'. Please note how the religious discourse overshadows the main content, simply because the uploader used the tagging name of Shia, thus targeting a sectarian sentiment. The ease with which one is using such abusive words while discussing the belief system of others compels one to argue for YouTube as a platform which is abusive and allows derogatory sentiments to surface very directly. It leads one to wonder how the experience of interacting passively and actively on YouTube defines an expression of sexual freedom for people from a country which is generally religious, where they feel much freer in expressing sentiments which are more restrictive in the physical space?

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so u saying that Quran does allow u to call anyone kafir?  
and u also saying that Quran is limited to some time frame , great

**pakistani4lyfee** (6 months ago) Show Hide

Reply

r u fucking retarded? when the fuck i said quran is limited to some time frame? I said you are fucking taking the quote out of context. Read the full surah. WTF!

and i don see any restrictions of calling a kaffir when she/he is.

**bravouk666** (6 months ago) Show Hide

Reply

r u fucking retarded? )))) this explain what u follow and how much u do?

so u saying that using this kind of language is also not forbidden keep it up as this is not the religion Prophet (s) taught us

**pakistani4lyfee** (6 months ago) Show Hide

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Figure 6. 5: Religious sentiments and abusive language YouTube videos

In the above comments the word 'fuck' and the acronym 'WTF' along with writing words like Quran, Islam, Prophet, and Sura would be considered blasphemous if said out of the context of YouTube. I argue that, in a country where a Governor of Punjab was murdered for supporting a Christian girl who was alleged to have made blasphemous remarks and was condemned by religious groups unanimously, and yet, a country which bans YouTube on the basis of blasphemy, yet, no one from the participating community sees any threat to the dominant religious ideology by reading the comments on YouTube by fellow Pakistanis. The following comments are a continuation of the above and are placed here deliberately to offer a complete picture to show how some of

the terms like 'Sunni bitch', and 'Wahhabi Madorchot' (meaning 'Wahhabi mother fucker') are used with ease.

you know what there is no point of arguing with a stupid shia. You connect my frustrations with Islam. WTF!

You guys can't fix up your girls and whine all the time.

You guys are kaffirs and I don't really give a shit about you guys as you will burn in hell 4ever.

**theclosest** (6 months ago) Show Hide

+1Reply

Shes probably your sister...

you wahabi madarchot...

**theclosest** (6 months ago) Show Hide

**bravouk666** (6 months ago) Show Hide

Reply

first a fall i am not a shia and 2ndly who the hell are u to call anyone kafir? are u God? what authority u have?

the language u using is not Islamic and u giving fatwa

go and correct ur self first , what about misyar and halala? thats practiced in saudi ? does that mean all sunni bad?

u got all the videos which are un islamic and u giving fatwas hahahah

May Allah Guide u and give respect to ur sister and mother so that u respect others sisters ameen

**route80man** (6 months ago) Show Hide

i'd fcuk her

**route80man** (6 months ago) Show Hide

Reply

she is a fuckin sunni bitch..

**99300208** (6 months ago) Show Hide

0

Reply

ooh ooh ooh

fuck her she is with tight boobs &

really nice ass

**pblcenmy27951** (6 months ago) Show Hide

Figure 6.6 Abusive statements on YouTube including 'Sunni Bitch'

The comments above are mainly addressing each other. The comfort level required to call the dancer a 'fucking Sunni bitch' and 'Wahhabi madorchot' is made possible because of the freedom YouTube generates. This is a peculiar kind of freedom, because the detailed reading of the text shows that limited identity is revealed to the other as far as religion and nationality are concerned. However, this does not restrain one from making such comments. The danger of physical proximity to the opponent invites censorship or physical violence. The language I have experienced during my field research was very different from what one reads freely on YouTube. Even though this research has shown that the virtual space is only a continuation of the physical space, nevertheless the absence of an interviewer in this regard provides one with an insight into a freer and more natural expression of the subjects i.e. they don't feel the need to first apologetically justify their practices and then express their desire for indulgence of such material. This platform helps transcend the gender gap of the interviewer/researcher. 'The notion of "platform" is only one of several metaphors widely used to stress YouTube's social, economic and technological importance. When plunging into YouTube discourse, one indeed begins to wonder about the apparent resemblances YouTube bears to a number of established cultural institutions' .... 'but in any given cultural context, moving onto the platform and watching a video obviously entails more than that', (Snickars & Vonderau, 13) as is apparent from the trends and inclination of this community on YouTube which is an extension of the existing attitudes in a much more explicit format.

In another video of a dance among students of a NUML university, out of only two comments, 'what is this, Muslim porn?'<sup>154</sup> is a validation of the terms I used in describing this genre in the first and the third chapter where it is beside the point whether the term porn is used in the actual understanding of the word in the western sensibility. Instead, anything which is erotic or excites someone in Pakistan, would be termed as porn in a general sense. It is evident by looking at

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<sup>154</sup> Video on YouTube. Accessed: December 2011  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ZIsSojEHGE&feature=related>,

the video and the use of the term porn that a western idea of porn invokes a viewing of sexual act that directly shows the sexual organs which is definitely not the meaning used by the commentator. The question of how to distinguish 'porn' from 'Muslim porn' is to be considered. How does a sexual act become religiously inclined, for instance, what exactly is the Muslimness in this video? I wanted to highlight this aspect because it reflects a certain mindset, which has used or coined this term and I am only expressing it for analysis. Who are the consumers of such videos and the comments who did not react to it as blasphemous, as this category is coming from the consumers and resources themselves? These terms are tools and techniques of negotiating of establishing one's Muslimness and piety to override the guilt of watching illicit material. I have understood so far by watching and reading the texts of the videos that 'porn' seems to mean anything with a female that moves. The woman should belong to Pakistani culture and is either caught unguarded on camera indulging in her own expression, or is being used to entertain men. However, more close to everyday life, situations will have more chances of inciting such terminologies. In the case of these 'Muslim porn' videos, the fact that these women might not belong to porn industry creates a sensationalism that triggers commentators to label them as 'bitch', 'porn', and more.

Some of the selected comments on the video of a maulvi with a girl sitting on his lap, titled '*Swat main Taliban ke kale kartoot*' (Taliban's sexual practices in Swat) reflects the state of denial by one person who is responding in defense of the term maulvis, while the one who accuses the maulvis of hypocrisy and moral degeneration provides him with more evidence of other Deoband maulvis' videos on YouTube and further accuses him of not admitting the reality.<sup>155</sup> It is very interesting to note again that the discourse that takes place is much safer on YouTube, because it is unimaginable to have a discussion/dialogue with any religiously inclined person over such taboo topics. We have seen some instances of media discussions, for example when the model Veena Malik confronted a maulvi live on TV, but it came with a price. It is also a known fact that one of the

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<sup>155</sup> Videos on YouTube.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZu4fPdpXo&feature=related>, 4.06.12, total comments: 244



liberal religious scholars, Ghamdi had to leave Pakistan for Malaysia where he lives now because of the death threats he received from Hafiz Saeed.<sup>156</sup> His only crime was that he gave a television lecture on a liberal and tolerant Islamic value system. Over here on this platform, the community that is formed at one level is expressing freely without holding back any abusive terminology. On the other level, everyone believes in the anonymity of the commentator and accepts it with a much stronger sense of tolerance than is present in the physical space. The statement narrates that the maulvis are involved in adultery in front of every one and that is how they defame Islam, 'also go 2 my watch later playlist and checkout video no. 126 Deoband maulvi exposed in madrasah aur dekh teray maaderchod maulvi kaisay zina mein paray huway hein aur kaisay is tarah kee harkatein kar k islam kaa naam bara roushan kar raha hain terajasoos in reply to Nawab Ahsan Jan Brohi

To this comes the reply, '*Laanat ho tum per baighairat Allah ki grift mai zaroor ayo ge go ksi kmine shakhs ko dekh ker Maulviun ko gali dete ho, Thair beta Maulviun ko jitna gali dena hai do aakhir kabir mai jao ge phir Allah ki azzab dekho ge kitna jeo ge Allah tallah ne farmaya hai her nafs ko maut ka mazaa chakhna hai . aj gali de rhe kel kabir mai pta chale ga Allah ki naik bundo ko gali dene ka anjaam kya hota hai*', meaning 'don't imagine anyone as maulvi, because whoever blames maulvis will go to Hell and Allah will punish him'. However, no one asks who is the uploader and if it is really a true maulvi or not. Further, this question is not asked to the individual who uploaded the video. To imagine an interaction with a maulvi face to face with such directness is out of question in order to maintain safety. I would again like to position this video along with the comments posted above where I argued that media is being created, pirated, used/abused, and recycled to form other meanings within groups of communities on YouTube. The fact that one continues to watch such videos that 'reveal' the actual side of the Taliban or maulvis is supporting the same sensationalism as well as venting emotions in that people might want to see the 'real' face of maulvis. Whether in the form of tagging, or depicting dichotomies in

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<sup>156</sup> Video on YouTube. Retrieved 2:10 pm, 24<sup>th</sup> October 2012  
<http://www.javedahmadghamidi.com/index.php/videos/view/religious-extremism-why-ghamdi-left-pakistan>,

reality shows, it does not invoke questions about who and how this video came about, or who allows the making of such films while they are having fun. Questions like these do not enter anyone's imagination in these accounts of subcultural practices, as everyone is busy consuming and participating in the narratives promising reality shows.

The option to have an account with any user identity offers immense freedom in the expression of interaction over the web. It is very important to note that where 'the notion that the media now allow us to all create our own complex, diverse and many faceted notions of personal identity', (Creeber & Martin, 18) and 'a world where users generate and distribute content, often with freedom to share, create, use and reuse' (Ibid., 19)<sup>157</sup>, very often the choice of words and the content of the sentences reveals some ideas and impressions about the user. And sometimes the names they choose for their personal identity also strongly suggest their several ideological and personal preferences. However, for my analysis here, I would posit this notion of choosing anonymous identity and problematize it further, because when you come across names chosen as their IDs, the commentators tend to go for some real names as well, like Fatima, Umar, Haider etc. One could argue that it is still not clear whether it is their own name or chosen on the basis of some liking. To choose a name which reflects gender also means that it is playing on a different domain than totally anonymous IDs such as '555', or 'free4all'. Therefore, it would be more pertinent to state that YouTube guarantees anonymity, but some people like to use their own identity and become part of this community. These commentators enjoy the freedom of physical distance but are comfortable enough with their own gender to play the game on YouTube.

### ***Commenting on Regional Politics and Desire***

Some more comments on India-Pakistan and blaming western culture for every ill in society, springs from watching a shot of a girl on mobile, while her lover is recording her video. After the talk, while she is aware of the recording, she smiles and interacts briefly with the lover but most of the time is busy in

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<sup>157</sup> This is a debate generated in discussing the theoretical approaches to media approaches, like Web 2.

checking herself out in the mirror. A very simple video like this one can attract around 7, 460,043 hits, while the total number of the comments on the day of writing this piece were 1022, in itself a very strong signifier of the aesthetics and the sensationalism of a peculiar kind. 'In fact new media has played a decisive and highly significant role in the reconfiguring of pleasure. In itself pleasure must always be caught between its location within what is culturally acceptable and the drive to exceed these acceptable domains' (Fuery, 111). Another comment series of India-Pakistan hate on a university girl dancing<sup>158</sup> and other posts on a mujra dance video<sup>159</sup> reflects similar concerns, like



Figure 6.7 Comments regarding India Pakistan conflict <sup>160</sup>

The above comments are a mere reflection of the emotions people have on Indian-Pakistani politics. The one comment which is genuinely asking for information about the song is not entertained at all. On the other hand, one reads a transition from one discourse to another. Initially, he alleges that the other belongs to India, defying the YouTube provision of anonymity. I am not claiming that the true identity is revealed, but I argue that this comment highlights the desire of placing the other in some context, and preferably the worst possible option is selected. Then there is a threat: 'don't post comment like this otherwise I will show ur India pic and ur girls doing'. The stereotypical discourse of playing nationalist discourse on the basis of women is evident through these posts. Finally, we observe the sudden dive into Islam. The shift is inevitable and I argue

<sup>158</sup> A Video on YouTube.

4:06:12<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ua4evLOlSc&feature=fvwp>,

<sup>159</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjDi9AuFQVI>

<sup>160</sup> *ibid*, dated December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2011

that it is a continuation of the same approach as of the consumers and producers I have interviewed and discussed in earlier chapters.

wow over seven million ppl has seen this clip with interest and every one is abusing the film maker and uploader. The question arises why these bitches allow the shooting in first place and why they are indulge in this dirty profession. As you sow, shall you reap. All this happens due to the influence of western cultures, where gay marriages, marriage between son and mother, brother and sister is constitutionally allowed in the name of personal freedom and no one decries. God help us. Ameen  
toasadkk 1 month ago<sup>1</sup>

Figure 6.8: Condemnation of western influence on Pakistani culture<sup>161</sup>

This comment is typical of the way the West is condemned for all problems. The person who is commenting does not, for a second, question the intention and the nature of the person who uploaded it. Instead, he is amazed to see why people are condemning the uploader. The fact that millions are now viewing a personal moment between two people, obviously without the knowledge of a woman, is not registered. The commentators abuse the woman as a bitch and hold the west responsible for the problems. The freedom to say any thing on YouTube is reflected by the last part of the comment where 'marriage between son and mother, brother and sister is constitutionally allowed'. A sweeping statement like this does not necessarily mean that the commentator actually believes in it. Imaginary stories are always told and narrated to impress upon one's point of discussion. The series of comments below is placed here primarily to see the level of interaction on the video of a woman talking on mobile. I argue that so many emotions, frustrations, and issues are boiling up in the present society that needs to be articulated. In the absence of acknowledgment of such issues, like sexual freedom and dichotomy,

<sup>161</sup> A video on YouTube. June 4, 2012.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YvIQfFsF5Xc&feature=related>,

ethnic conflicts, extreme religiosity vs indulgence into sexual entertainment and many more, one continues to see the discourse which is developing in a culturally oppressed society. These comments placed below connect my earlier argument with using the theoretical model of 'oppressive hypothesis' where one encounters the discourse on sexuality in every sense, but it is not regulated and part of mainstream discourse.

1:38 scene was funny ;D pithipitho 7 months ago  
 i agree with you lovepeace30 in reply to 07105006 (Show the comment) 7 months ago  
 the filmer is a sucker ;D TheDisturbed316 7 months ago  
 She is prostitue so what the big deal. ranahasan24 7 months ago  
 this video is not more than a bitch shit ThePrasad619 8 months ago  
 Yeah true India has biggest sex market filled wid muslims ereuroracer in reply to cornatto22 (Show the comment) 8 months ago  
 Just shut the fuck up!!! I am Muslim and i am proud to be it ... Sexism is more common in Hindus u son of bithces... Dont offend religion of any type and go dance in front of your Devtas .... Bloody self made gods they are swatpod110 in reply to aliontop69 (Show the comment) 8 months ago **Reply**  
 this is so wrong. afghanhalek 8 months ago  
 baboogosha this is your sister and you want to make money by selling her thats is shame. I know you did it before it is o.k. but on you tube that is totally wrong sraza86 8 months ago  
 another hindu liar  
 amjadami in reply to aliontop69 (Show the comment) 10 months ago  
 SALEEE HINDU RANNNDU MUJKO MAT SEKHA SAAALEE NA JANI KETO SAY CHUDWA CHUKI HOOGE 969432014 9 months ago **Reply**  
 If I am a Hindu, I am much better than a muslim. I embrace Hinduism and spit on Islam then. aliontop69 9 months ago  
 Let's just say that comment showed us all just how "great" hinduism really is. If you want people to believe that be a good example. Saying statements don't do shit. People like you just make me laugh. MissRabixoxo in reply to aliontop69 (Show the comment) 9 months ago  
 FUCK U RACIST HINDUS..... INDIA HAS THE NO.1 BIGGEST SEX MARKET IN THE WORLD..... LOOK UR FACE IN THE MIRROR FIRST BEFORE ABUSING OTHERS..... cornatto22 in reply to aliontop69 (Show the comment) 9 months ago  
 toba toba alyz69 9 months ago

Figure 6.9: Indian Pakistani rage over video of a girl talking on phone.

The original comment by Aliontop69 was 'Who ever did this is son of a bitch. You Muslims Pakistani have no morals. This what Islam teaches you to screw someone's life? This is so wrong to expose someone. If Islam teaches this, then shit on Islam and your fucking religion. Hate Muslims. By the way I was raised a

Muslim and no wonder I hate this religion so much, especially Pakistani people’.

Indian gushti lun le k naach rahi hay ishaqzafar 1 month ago

FUCK YEAHHHHH.. fuck this PORK-SHIT-TANI bitch... they  
crave of indian lund dats y veena malik ur PAK-SHIT-TANI sister came  
to india for getting fucked..... nice dance by tha  
way magicmayankmaverick 1 month ago

ye sb to india ki soghaat haiN meri jaan india ko lgooNN..tu  
kbhi aa meray samnay or sun!!!! chor shilwar peeli hojaegi  
teri..! salmanrauf40 in reply to chrisharris550 (Show the comment) 1  
month ago **Reply**

pakistan benchodabad srinath13 in reply to Attitude Breaker  
(Show the comment) 1 month ago

grammatical error madarsa kid..!! magicmayankmaverick in  
reply to firekid326 (Show the comment) 1 week ago

and ignorent firekid326 in reply to magicmayankmaverick  
(Show the comment) 1 week ago

your complete and total dumbass! firekid326 in reply to

magicmayankmaverick (Show the comment) 1 week ago

so dat makes me racist..!! big deal..!! yes i am a racist person  
but i am not pitiful.i am very possessive for my country n i see each n  
every pakistani s a potential terrorist n threat to my country.so wat..!! i  
may be wrong in ur terms but put urself in my shoes.for me my country  
comes forth my religion but for pakistanis their religion comes first  
before evrything.u mite say dat i am wrong again n dats not the ground  
reality but dats what i feel n think. magicmayankmaverick in reply to  
speroad (Show the comment) 1 week ago **Reply**

ts fake video. I am study in university of Lahore and we not  
have that kind of class.

Figure 6.10: Indian Pakistani rage

Total number of comments received to this date is 1273 which, viewed in comparison to the very hot and popular mujra dancer Saima Khan who received only 17 comments, is definitely reflective of the trends of interests of men in indulging sexually on more sexually implicit but provocative in terms of religious

and political sensibility of identity politics. In the heat of discussion, one person who claims that the location of the video mentioned in the title is not correct is totally ignored, as is the person claiming to be studying in the same university. The other studies that are conducted largely on blogs space as public space inferred by observations as, 'various empirical studies on forum discussions, which consistently find that only a small proportion of forum participants engage in public debate. It has been argued that most people use forums for entertainment or personal expression, rather than debate' (Boomen, 242), adds a twist to the current research. In the material presented here, it is suggested that the pure entertainment space is used to satiate sexual desires as well as to embark on personal identity representation by indulging into religious and political discourse. Since a large amount of studies on forum discussions revolve around cultural identity struggles, it would also be appropriate to incorporate YouTube in the larger scheme of cultural identity formation. The platform of YouTube inherently offers and facilitates transcendence from social stereotypes, which might not mean that viewers are able to transcend their prejudices, preferences, and other complexities, but nevertheless are able to transcend virtually the burden of identifying oneself with another person who is interacting in the physical sense. To bring back the argument of Humphrey, it is clear by her findings that the interaction on these forums is not 'consequence-free', (Humphrey, 48). The consequence, in this case, is the said ban on YouTube and restraining of millions of Pakistanis from surfing it. The fact that this was an election year in Pakistan and all the religious parties played on the religious sentiments of the people, where the present government could afford to lift the ban just in case the religious parties use this against them in the next election campaign, is effective use of new media for wider political games and gains.

Online communication does not fixate identities but constantly transforms them. The interface of YouTube reflects, in the light of all these comments and postings, the prevalent dichotomy, which is ignored simultaneously as a continuation of the ambivalence one finds in the attitudes towards sexual practices in the public sphere and the role of state. The peculiar tagging that brings the diverse videos together ranging from religious content to sexually explicit videos placed on its interface forms a public space of its own,



emerging in a path that reveals the path of the consumer. Even through a cursory surf through the material one can easily understand from the nature of the comments posted that the debate over the videos usually swings from the content of the video to other commentators, attacking each other's religious and other political sentiments, the hottest of them being the India- Pakistan rivalry and Shia-Sunni debate.

### ***Plain and simple desire of mujra dance videos***

The most popular genres, which become the object of desire are watched regularly on YouTube, but are rarely commented on. Just to compare how simple and obvious is the nature of the sexual expression on watching very explicit hot mujra dance videos, the following are some of the comments on Saima Khan and Anjuman Shahzadi's dance videos.

Saima what aSex---y mal Yaar love to suck your Lovely Boobs. ishwar6023 1 week ago  
saima khan k mammay aur phudi bilkul meri behn jesay hn m n dekha tha usy nahatey hue Umar4720 1 week ago  
This has been flagged as spam show Rajni Kapoor 1 week ago  
saima khan boobz out good dence sex  
ww-wwwwwwwwwww  
wwwwwwwwwwwwwwwmmmmmm-mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm  
mmmmmmmmmmmmmm-mmmmmmmmmmm moovechannel 1 week ago  
ago Reply  
Shia randi TheShamsulhaq 3 months ago  
0323-3492958 for mutta fatma3596 in reply to TheShamsulhaq (Show the comment) 1 month ago<sup>1</sup>

Figure 6.11: Comments on Saima Khan's video<sup>162</sup>

<sup>162</sup> A video with comments on YouTube. Retrieved on April 6, 2012.  
[http://www.youtube.com/all\\_comments?v=ZEHWpOzj47o](http://www.youtube.com/all_comments?v=ZEHWpOzj47o)

she wants to be fucked more than once in her bussy and back ther is  
 no one but me can satisfy her alot across her body and her nice  
 boobs sharaf432 8 months ago  
 donkey dance AfghanKnight007 8 months ago 7 **Reply**  
 Maanchod saali apne mome dikha dikha ke te choot hila hila ke hi  
 lun khara kar dindi hai,kende si ke ehe ik raat chudan da 5000  
 rupia laindi si te ehnu kaian ne lahore de ik hotel ch chodea  
 si. keyboard1052 8 months ago r so beautiful baby.....i love  
 u xyz1234822 1 year ago **Reply** very hottt aman5213 1 year  
 ago 03332233083 heartplaces44 1 year ago  
 iski gand mar dunga

Figure 6. 12: Anjuman Shehzadi comments<sup>163</sup>

Another mujra dance video generating only seven comments<sup>164</sup>,

so sweety malik wasiq 1 week ago **Reply**  
 so sexy deenmodansari 2 weeks ago wah wah malikasad16 4  
 weeks ago

Figure 6.13: Simple comments

These comments are significant to note in terms of the openness and freedom with which people are commenting without fearing judgment from anyone viewing these, whether females or males. These are important to compare with the interview I have conducted on the notion of consumption, because the gender divide was difficult to transcend. On the other hand, the comments reiterate the terms used in the common sensibilities, which are ranging from abusive Punjabi to English terms. Another aspect that is important to mention here is that a mujra dance video that offers dance as per the expectations of the viewers, like the dancer coming from a peculiar background, the predictable movements of the dance to allure viewers and pandering to male gaze, are consumed in a simple way. The tensions and discontent are created when the desire is associated with videos from varied genres and backgrounds. Only after

<sup>163</sup> A video with comments on YouTube. Retrieved on June 4, 2012.  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7eZEhBl7Dkc&feature=related>, 4 June 2012.

<sup>164</sup> A video with comments on YouTube. Retrieved on April 6, 2012.  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8m1ryk\\_Asio&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8m1ryk_Asio&feature=related),

people have played around tagging, titling, and watching videos from 'reality' date shows does it generate a huge response and a new media is created on YouTube, which reflects the negotiations people are making with desire interlinked with religion and politics.

My major concerns that shaped the thesis research are about how I define and trace the similarities between the interviews I have conducted on consuming and desiring the mujra dance videos, and the pattern of the comments posted under these dance videos on YouTube. By reading the material of these videos and the comments posted by the consumers, my main concern was to understand the wider community of people who are chatting and participating on YouTube with these dance videos, while analyzing them in the light of what consumers have commented on in their interviews in the net cafes and otherwise. The main concerns of the media over Internet infiltration is primarily the use of pornography through these technologies, as Glen Creeber suggests as, 'the Internet is regarded as a dangerous and out of control technology that allows pornography, extreme religious/political fanaticism and computer hackers/viruses to continually undermine civil society' (2009, 6). All of these are reflected, even through a cursory examination of the contents of the comments posted under these videos. In one of the responses, by a Pakistani commentator to the report on the usage of Internet in Pakistan, it was said that if the number of porn sites were included in the survey the results of the usage would be very different from what they are at present. These observations are largely confirmed by various empirical studies on forum discussions, which consistently find that only a small proportion of forum participants engage in public debate. It has been argued that most people use forums for entertainment or personal expression, rather than debate (Boomen, 242). So for entertainment forums or sites, it would be argued that this community uses the entertainment as a means to express their religious and political sentiments.

It is important to reiterate here that terms like 'hot', 'sexy', 'porn', 'Muslim porn', 'Sunni Bitch', 'Wahhabi Madorchot', and others are the result of the unleashed creative and wild expressions of people's interactions in which they consciously and unconsciously they try to make their video a more sought-after

item by tagging the videos as sensationally as possible. This is interesting to understand that by doing this, YouTube has altered the relationship between pornography and other media, primarily by the interactive tagging tool, and the freedom to upload and post comments. YouTube is a tool for abuse and it becomes a media in another sense due to its comments. It takes a life of its own. It develops the way people shape it, which is seldom the objective of the person who initially uploaded the video. It is a virtual space, but the comments are a reflection of everyday concerns and issues people are living in. One thing people are not doing on YouTube is feeling inhibited, and they therefore are commenting whatever they feel.

The significance of this research lies in the multiple practices around digital technological culture, which is shaping present day Pakistani society. As I discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, and elaborated later as well, access to the technology, even by the illiterate, enables the person to interact with the media at cheap prices, through mobile phones paying a very nominal price of twenty or fifty rupees and getting videos and songs downloaded on the phones which is somewhat close to the term 'digital revolution' (Creeber & Martin, 5)<sup>165</sup>. Another angle of this concept can be clearly understood by looking at the example of a video with maulvi whose two friends are taking his video on a mobile phone while he caresses and then makes the dancer sit on his lap (see fig. 6.14).<sup>166</sup> In the video we see quite an interesting interaction between a bearded man and two women. The ostensibly religious<sup>167</sup> looking man, is fully clothed and holds and fondles a woman while a Punjabi mujra song is being played in the background. The other woman is an accomplice who facilitates him in his

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<sup>165</sup> It is significant for mujra dance context to understand this term as, 'The 'Digital Revolution' is a recent term describing the effects of the rapid drop in cost and rapid expansion of power of digital devices such as computers and telecommunications...In particular, digital culture is associated with the speeding up of societal change, causing a number of technological and social transformations in a surprisingly short amount of time'.

<sup>166</sup> A video on YouTube. Accessed: May 20, 2012.  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZu4fPdpxXo&feature=related>

<sup>167</sup> By religious looking man, I mean to use the popular categorization of certain appearances, while being aware of the fact that I do not mean to generalize stereotypes.

maneuvers. What is most striking here is the ease with which all of them are performing in front of cameras as if it is part of everyday life. The hand appearing at the right side holding a mobile phone recording this performance verifies the everyday use of new media technologies by the laypersons.<sup>168</sup> The presence of multiple people recording this casual performance is visible as one sees the legs of the main film recorder in the main frame. It most significantly shows the ease of the handling and using of these digital technologies, and simultaneously the comfort level of people towards indulging in sexual activities in front of friends. Although one does not encounter males without clothes in these videos, indulging in these activities forms another part of the debate, which is not being discussed at the moment in this chapter. Quite significantly, this video had 1,399,993 hits on the day recorded in footnotes despite the fact it shows no nudity, yet the content is sensationalized by the peculiar act of tagging and the dichotomy revealed through the videos.



Figure 6.14 Screen shot of a maulvi with a dancer on his lap while a friend makes his video, 'Taliban ke kale kartoot'.

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<sup>168</sup> A video with comments on YouTube. Retrieved May 20, 2012. Please see at 1:07 minutes for the hand with a mobile. Also see the index for a screen shot of the hand. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZu4fPdpxXo&feature=related>

Having removed the burden of immediate identity, I argue that given the above possibilities on YouTube it is even more interesting to note that the behaviors which have been discussed in the discursive practices of sexually illicit material and its consumption are further carried on in a peculiar manner. The acceptability of all these expressions of desire, discursive practices, the state's ambivalence, and extreme indulgence in the most creative and pirated way in the face of religious inkling are what we experience when we search through YouTube and our paths converge with all these diverse materials uploaded as creatively as possible. Therefore, I assert that YouTube as a digitised new space is a transformed Mall Road for sexuality discourse of mujra dance videos. Further, after reading through the material presented here, one can deduce that virtual space is in actuality a space that, though larger in scope, is merely a continuation of physical space, where all the tensions, struggles, power plays, and assumptions towards other are being played out by the mujra dance video consumer's operations.



## Conclusion

In this thesis, I examined male desire and construction of masculinity by analyzing discursive practices of traditional semi porn mujra dance videos in present day Pakistani popular culture. I explored the transformative mujra dance practices from live performance culture on stage to video format and then digital technology and new media, including YouTube, and argued that their user-friendly nature and development has helped develop these as new sites of sexual practice and consumption. The new media and digital technologies enable the common layperson to express their sexual desire by making videos without any prior professional training. In the course of analyses, I have examined the production of mujra videos, critically evaluating the visual and lyrical content of the dance and songs, and examined the distribution circuits formed on piracy networks. Reading through the practices and evaluating consumer's interviews, I presented how the perceptions are formed about the notion of desire and 'imagined' sexual fulfillment of men belonging to different backgrounds than the interviewees.

This thesis addressed questions about practices and complexities of negotiations of illicit male sexual desire for consumption of Mujra dance videos with the notion of piety and Muslimness. I examined, through extensive research data, the relationship of the interlocutors as the agents of desire, their view and perception of public space versus private space for the manifestation of sexual desire and the complexities prevalent in negotiating their desire upon encountering female sexual desire. These complexities were analyzed in the binary of public versus private sphere - desiring a sexually powerful woman an expression of fantasy and desire revealed through content analysis of lyrics of mujra dance songs – which complicates the male sexual desire in the face of overtly patriarchal value system, encouraging control over female sexuality in domestic sphere.

This dissertation draws heavily from the theoretical framework developed by Ravi Sundaram, and furthers his argument by asserting that discursive formations i.e. piracy networks that engage existing infrastructures of old media, are a powerful force that enable people to assert



their agencies and subvert the dominant religious state ideology to fulfill their sexual desire. Lisa Wadeen's political analysis of symbols inscribed in cultural practices of everyday in the Islamic world, as subversive and creative tools of negotiations with orthodox religious and political structures, frame theoretically the presence of religious symbols, Quranic verses, and images of Mecca and Prophet's tomb, adorning the walls of the pornographic shops in Hall Road plazas. I argue that people have employed creative maneuvering techniques to ward off any authoritarian oppressive tools of the state and the public rage. Brian Larkin's engagement with circuits of piracy network helped develop analysis about the piracy CD network in Pakistan and its distribution circuits. I argued that sexual desire for mujra dance videos constructed a peculiar system of production, which enabled piracy circuit distributors and shopkeeper to experiment with digital technologies and become producers of the mujra dance videos by forming exploitative relationships with the dancers of mujra videos and recording it digitally.

The dichotomous practices of consumers and producers are read in this research as negotiations of sexual desire with the rigid orthodox moralist structures indoctrinated during the military rule of Zia-ul-Haq. I argued that the technological flow bypassed the orthodox control over modes and agencies of cultural productions, and the 'aesthetic formation' of these negotiations are situated in the imagined sense of Muslim nationhood, which claims piety despite indulgence in illicit sexual practices. To understand the complexities of male desire and its negotiations with overt religious ideology and moral values prevalent in Pakistani society, I analyzed the urban geography of the city, Lahore, with law enforcing and regulatory authorities' location in close vicinity of production and distribution centers of mujra CD networks. I further cross examined the virtual space of YouTube, its search paths, tagging and titling styles of the mujra videos, and the comments posted, making all of these as a medium in its own right. The discursive practices on Mall Road and an analysis of the post on YouTube revealed the similarities between the two sites. The traditional sites of desire, *kothas* replaced Internet cafés and virtual sites like YouTube with clicks, icons, and

search paths on the flat screen of the computer. The two sites of desire share a similar set of dichotomies and negotiations that help construct a sense of piety and Muslimness while fulfilling their illicit sexual desire and mujra dance practices. I linked the debate of Muslim public sphere and the notion of piety in relation to the complexities of male desire, with the theoretical framework of Charles Hirschkind's piety discourse and new media technologies in the Muslim world. By using his study in framing my argument, I contest that the new media and digital technologies are helping Pakistani mujra dance consumers/producers shape their religious identities. It provides them agency to express illicit sexual desires, which uses digital technologies to make their own productions, and create a discourse on YouTube, which is religious and political but emanates sexual fantasies and desires.

My arguments helped in developing a thesis that showcased that the magnitude and modes of consumption of these mujra dances in physical space as well as virtual space, the way these videos are produced because of technological ease employing piracy networks, indicate how new media is being used to manifest male sexual desire despite rigid religious controls of the state and overt piety ideology. The study of this sexual discourse helps us understand much more comprehensively the scope with which new media technologies are helping people to assert their agency. This aspect is very important in my study as in previous studies, Muslim cultures are examined as dominantly overwhelmed with the notion of piety, whereas, I argue for new media as a tool of subversion that helps accelerate the profane desire, and does not affect their sense of belonging with the pious Muslim world.

This thesis further argues that new media space is actually, in essence, a continuation of contradictions, discursive practices, and similar social behavioral patterns. The thesis contributes to the larger international audience, especially the Muslim world, to bring about the complexities with which the Muslim societies are negotiating with the new media in which they are busy in not only establishing their political agency within and outside their state run ideological apparatus, but also in the way they engage with sexual

pleasure and entertainment with the help of the same media. I claim in my research that the new media is also enabling Muslims to express their desire in a way that helps them transcend the ideological discourse established by the state and the society, within the same 'totality' of practices which is not recognized by any of the scholarship on new media and the Muslim world.

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